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PRAYER IN MODERN LIFE

BY

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INTRODUCTION

THE practice of prayer is to-day in one sense more daunting and in another more delightful than ever. The spread of general education has for some people illustrated and enriched the approach to God, while for others it has raised a bewildering set of problems which appear almost, if not quite, insoluble. We shall always have among us those happy men and women who are so assured by personal experience of the love and the nearness of God that worship for them is a sheer delight—the foundation romance of their lives. But there are very many others who find themselves forced, gladly or sadly, into agnosticism.

This book is an attempt to face candidly, if briefly, some of the impacts of modern life and thought on the practice of prayer. It tries to put in a simple and popular manner considerations which lead many of us to believe that, when the first difficulties are surmounted, the worship of God to-day may be at least as rich, varied, and reasonable as ever.

The word prayer is throughout used in its widest possible meaning. Only here and there is the attempt made to deal with any particular modes of praying or worshipping, the aim being rather to examine the justification for an attitude towards God and eternity which should produce a certain atmosphere throughout the whole of life ; a tone of mind which sees always in the contingent and passing events of life the presence of the infinite and the abiding.

THE TRADITION

The thinking Christian to-day is conscious broadly of two dominating elements in his religious life. He is on the one

hand the inheritor of an illustrious, ancient, and sacred tradition, which comes down to him through history, and shows him the infinitely varied ways by which God has made Himself known to man, and has drawn out from man in return the response of adoration, love, and trust. It has become enriched by an always developing understanding on man's part of many sides of the eternal mystery. This development is visible and undeniable ; the knowledge of God is an unfolding which never ceases or can cease.

The tradition on its human side has come to carry an immense wealth of association. Millions have received and loved it, have found themselves at home in it, have made their contribution to it. Each has been in a greater or less degree enlightened by God, and has listened to His voice, both in the teaching of the institutional Church and in the quietness of the interior life. Some, comparatively the very few, have been able to put their experience on record—to speak it or to write it down, so that others have been able to profit by it. Illustrious names stand out in history, prophets and seers, poets and thinkers, the poor also and the unlearned. Philosophy, history, art, music, architecture, nature, have contributed to make the tradition magnificent, and to clothe it with learning and beauty. Every human temperament has felt its power and has responded to it. High and low, rich and poor, one with another, have gloried in it, and realized themselves within its infinite variety. It has gone far to make our civilization what it is to-day. It maintains a recognizable set of beliefs about God, congruous with one another. It asks the individual to give his assent in certain broad particulars to the general mind.

But at the centre of it is one salient fact. The tradition shows us God trying in all history to ' get through ' to man ; to show him some part of His glory. For the heart and mind of man are the primary means by which God reveals Himself. And the tradition rests in the last resort on the accumulation of the experience of the noblest men and women the world

has known. This is the ultimate basis of the authority of the Church, as it is also the justification of prayer.

THE SCIENTIFIC AGE

Into this ancient tradition has come leaping and exulting the new scientific method and learning ; at first dogmatic and destructive, now more cautious and humble, but intimately bound up with the Christian religion. In anthropology, biology, psychology, discoveries have followed fast upon one another. History and theology have felt the impact, and thought has been hard at work in all the departments of modern life. It is not only that fresh discoveries of God's method of creation have come to us ; our view of the nature of man and the duration of his life on this planet have been revolutionized.

There is no side of our life of which the scientific spirit has been more keenly critical than of religion. This is inevitable and right ; for if the new knowledge is true, as in many ways it demonstrably is, it must affect our thoughts about God, man, and the soul. It cannot touch the essential facts of God's self-communication to man, and of man's capacity to receive that revelation. But it has vastly complicated many people's ideas about life, eternity, and prayer. If it has made some things easier to believe, it has certainly made others at first sight more difficult. It has in fact affected the attitude of vast numbers of intelligent persons towards the whole conception of man's relation with God. It may be well at this point briefly to outline the attitude of certain different classes of minds towards religion, in view of the impact of modern science.

CLASSES OF MINDS

1. Some men and women—shall we call them unfortunate or fortunate ?—appear still to be wholly unaffected by the modern spirit. They hold the ancient tradition of the literal inspiration of the Scriptures, with or without the support

of an infallible Church. They appear to be hardly conscious that anything has happened ; or else they think that it does not matter. Probably these people will always exist, though in the nature of things it would seem inevitable that they should grow fewer in course of time. The consistent holiness of many of them is an inspiration to us all.

2. There are others, who undoubtedly have a considerable knowledge of modern discoveries and modern methods, who seem to possess the power of keeping their thought in water-tight compartments ; so that, while of necessity admitting that something has happened, they act, and even teach, as though the tradition stood virtually unaffected. I frankly do not understand how this is done. That those who take this attitude are utterly sincere I know well ; some of them are near friends of my own.

3. Others, again, have felt bound to make a more or less complete sacrifice of the old tradition, and to start again on practically fresh lines. These differ in the extent to which they depart from tradition ; but many of them think that God, if He exists, is so remote from us as to be practically unknowable, and prayer so uncertain that one can only be reverently agnostic about it.

4. And then there is that great body of men and women—I suppose the majority of educated modern Christians—who accept the essentials of the ancient tradition as true, and as being a valid revelation of God, capable of infinite extension. Most of these are not scholars in the technical sense, though they try to keep themselves abreast of the thought of their time as best they can ; they are certainly not scientists, though they recognize the general bearings of the new view of the universe and of our world. They are to a greater or less extent aware of what is happening. Experience which cannot be denied has made them sure that God does reveal Himself to man, and to themselves in particular. They believe that the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ shows them supremely what God is, and what God would have man to be

They accept and use those means of grace by which God strengthens man to fulfil his true destiny. They are convinced that, if they will, the Spirit of God is ready to direct and rule their lives, in small things as in great. They accept, in fact, in main outline, the tradition of the historic Catholic Church, and desire to form their character upon it.

But they cannot shut their eyes to the impact of the scientific method and discoveries of the last century. They see that authority has to concern itself with the present and the future as well as with the past. They cannot believe that the revelation of God is closed; actual facts evidently negative any such idea.

It is to such persons that this book is tremblingly addressed. It is written from the point of view of such a person. It suffers to some extent from having been put together at different times during the last two or three years. But it has been written at a period of my life when I have been able to give more time to study than when I was the priest of great industrial parishes; and at a time also when I have been in close and constant touch with young men and women. It represents the real experience of a man living in the modern world.

The title is too ambitious and impressive for so inadequate an essay. But I have dared to use it because it expresses, better than others of which I thought, the aim I have had in mind. I find that a great many people are thinking along such lines as these. They want to bring into prayer all the beauty, romance, adoration, discipline, of which they are capable; and they want to link it up with whatever is true in the modern spirit.

I send forth this brief and imperfect book, therefore, in the hope that it may help a few men and women to realize more fully what I am discovering; that the new age has not destroyed the reasonableness of Christian prayer, but has made the service of God in worship richer, more varied, more exciting than ever.

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Prayer in Modern Life

CHAPTER I

RELIGION IN MODERN ENGLAND

NOT long ago a friend of mine was invited to preach the sermon at the Gaudy of a famous Oxford College, renowned for the intellectual brilliance of its Fellows. The Warden, in sending him the invitation, wrote, ' The College will be patient of a learned discourse.'

Daunting words ! They come into my mind forcibly when I consider the ambitious title of this book. But its readers will not be required to be patient of learning. I am not capable of such high matters. I claim to be no more than a sympathetic observer of the common religious life in England. I have had opportunities through many years of making a close study of several strata of English society ; I have intimate friends in all of them, who have spoken their minds vigorously to me on many occasions. All I can do is to share this kind of experience with my readers, in the hope that we may all be helped in the task, never more perplexing than to-day, of setting a living religion before our generation.

In the opening chapters we shall consider briefly certain widely expressed opinions regarding the gen-

eral condition of religion in England, examining more particularly the statement that a materialistic view of life is rapidly gaining ground among us. We shall then ask whether or no it is true that some new thoughts about God have come to our generation. Then, still on our preliminaries, we shall review our own prayer in the light of such knowledge of God as we have. After that the way will be open for the consideration of several departments of the life of worship, in view of the directions of modern religious thought.

THE ALLEGED MATERIALISM OF OUR AGE

A short time ago Archbishop Davidson said that he did not know any period of history when God was so evidently moving in the world as to-day. The Archbishop is not given to exaggeration, and he knows his world, particularly his England, better than most of us. When, therefore, he says anything so optimistic, it is worth while to listen to him ; his words have force.

But, on the other hand, we are much more commonly assured that all over the world the Church is called upon to uphold the faith of God made known in Christ against an all-pervading tendency to regard material salvation, with the ethical code which grows out of it, as sufficient for all human needs. We are told that most men now expect to be saved by civilization ; that the care of our health, and the health of our children, more and more widespread scientific knowledge, and the ways of life built upon it, are superseding the old idea of the salvation of the soul. The anthropomorphic religious conceptions of

Christianity, we are informed, are already laughed out of court, at least by the younger generation.

And it is not only Christianity, apparently, which is going, but all other forms of what is called religion. We are further assured that the increasing complexity of life is driving the thoughts of the spirit out of it. There simply is not time for religion. One must be practical ; self-realization, sufficient success in life, the making of a home, the propagation (within reasonable limits) of one's kind, are enough to engage any man's energies. And, moreover, it is said that the average man, even supposing that he had time for religion, has little or no interest in it. There may or may not be an eternal life for the individual beyond this one. But it is so uncertain that it is useless to speculate about it.

That is the theory ; and it must be admitted that at first sight it seems rather convincing. But a closer view of modern English life may make us pause before allowing the full force of the materialistic tendency with which we are threatened. It is strange to observe how great an interest is taken by men and women to-day in matters which at least are only remotely connected with material well-being. It is said that few people, particularly few men, have patience to listen to sermons. A little research, I believe, would prove that the generalization is untrue even about what is more technically known as preaching ; but if the number of those who attend instruction on various spiritual subjects could be reckoned, it would prove to be enormous. This I believe is much more true of institutional bodies such as the Church of England than is commonly allowed ; but

let us examine the situation in religious bodies somewhat far removed from our own sympathies.

Take, for instance, the Christian Scientists. In every part of the English-speaking world large churches are being built, which become more and more familiar to us in our daily walks. Rows of motor cars, small and great, are ranged about them during the time of service. Inside the buildings are large congregations of serious men and women, eagerly drinking in what to them is an inspiring and saving gospel. There is in these people something of the high seriousness of the early Christians. They are tireless in propaganda, by printed books and pamphlets and through personal efforts for the conversion of others. They pour out great sums of money, the evidence of self-sacrifice in rich and poor. They provide reading-rooms in the most expensive situations, attractively and comfortably furnished, and full of Christian Science books.

It is easy to say, with some truth, that the religion purveyed seems to us shallow, and even in some respects uncultured and puerile. If it were not that we have some evidence to the contrary, we could only suppose that those to whom it appeals must be the imperfectly educated. But there can be no doubt that Christian Science is spiritual and keenly alive. It is for us to account for the fact as best we may. At least the movement is not in the direction of materialism.

Or consider another body of persons, more foreign still to our ways of thinking. In the ranks of the Communists you will find numbers of stern, determined idealists, with the stuff of martyrs in them.

They will give up their Sunday rest, just as many Church people do, to the arduous tasks of preaching in the Park or teaching in Sunday School ; only here the teaching is not Christianity, but godlessness, enforced by blasphemous parodies of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* and other collections of sacred verse. It may perhaps be said that what is actually taught by such people is materialistic. I wonder. Anyway, the unflinching self-sacrifice offered in the cause is in itself admirable.

We are even seeing to-day a revival of such absurdities (so they appear to us) as British Israel and Fundamentalism. We may smile ; but while the former of these can fill the Albert Hall with an enthusiastic body of supporters, and get half a column in *The Times* the next day, it cannot be despised. And Fundamentalism has a certain distinct success among the young as well as the old, even at the Universities and in other unexpected places. British Israel, again, is eagerly propagandist, producing in fairly large numbers that kind of convinced evangelist who is one of the world's deadliest bores ! But at least he is sincere, and in downright earnest ; and he is no materialist.

Side by side with all these, and drawing its adherents from every class of life, as well as from every religious body, are the internationalists. These have grown vastly since the war, as was to have been expected. It is seen that patriotism is not enough for the future of the world, but that some international brotherhood of man must be made practical. And so we find everywhere to-day, in great cities and in the country places, groups of serious men and

women whose aim is the end of war and universal peace. Many of the individuals in these groups come from one or other of the religious bodies, though there are others among them who would deny that they have any religion at all—at least any supernatural religion.

Theirs is at least a noble ideal. The internationalists are much sneered at as visionaries by those who seem to regard war very nearly as God's will for man, or at least as man's inevitable plague. They find little sympathy in too large a part of the press, and not much enthusiasm from the general public. Their groups are apt to be the happy hunting ground where the crank seeks his natural prey. Yet it must surely be that they hold the future ; they must in the end be the movers and shakers of the world. And they are everywhere. They are an always present reminder that unselfishness, not ruthlessness, must be the spiritual ideal of mankind.

Added to these portents is the new interest of the press in specifically religious subjects ; and that not only in the more restrained newspapers, but in the popular organs as well. Is there a life after death ? What is prayer, and can it effect anything ? Is God good ? What proportion of the population goes to church ? What draws and what repels men and women ? These and kindred subjects are made the matter of prominent articles, which are eagerly canvassed in a mass of correspondence from readers too large for more than a fraction to be printed. It is true that to a trained theologian, or even to an ordinarily intelligent churchgoer, most of this writing appears to be shallow, confused, and ill-informed.

But it is evidence of a widespread interest in religion shown by the public mind. The press would not print such matter if it were not 'good copy.'

These are merely a few symptoms, noted almost at random, of movements of thought in England today. Some of them may be said to be hardly religious in the strict sense of the term ; others are developing apart from any of the institutional Churches ; others, again, are definitely religious, and show signs of development. All are symptoms of the fact that amid much materialism there is also a wide interest in the things of the spirit.

Moreover, these organizations, bodies, movements, call them what we will, are eagerly imparting their tenets to the young. It looks as if there might before very long be a check, at least, to the pervading tendency towards materialism.

WHAT UNDERLIES ALL THIS ?

Can it be said that there is any common idea, or group of ideas, underlying all this stir ? Widely varied as are the modes of the search, are they in fact different ? It seems to me that deep under them all are still the foundation ideas of the spirit of man, already asserting themselves against the tyranny of a brutal materialism.

What are these fundamentals ? Well, I suppose, life and love, and conflict and death, and what comes after death, and victory over the power of death ; good and evil, and deliverance from evil. These have been the subjects of all human thought ; of the finest literature, from Homer and the Greek drama down to our day ; of song and music ; of

poetry and folk tales and ancient tradition. The spirit of man may for a time, now and then, seem to turn aside from them to the consideration of commerce and comfort, of worldly success and materialism. But always the immortal longings remain, and after a little while man returns to them, because he must. Indeed, it may well be doubted whether the gospel of materialism ever really affects more than the few. The great mass of men and women are all the time quietly and of necessity facing the ultimate problems.

And it is just with these problems that Christianity supremely deals. What is the story of Jesus Christ but the last word about love and life and death, and victory over death ; about good and evil, and deliverance from evil ? The eternal drama is played out for us with unequalled power on the hills of Judaea and Galilee. And therefore, with whatever changes of doctrine and dogma, of place and setting, men turn back to it again. They may lose sight of it for a time, but never for long.

Then why, it may properly be asked, is it that so much of the life of the spirit which we see around us is apart from ourselves and our beliefs ? On all our theories it ought not to be. We believe that the historic Catholic Church, of which we are members, is the depositary of the faith of the Gospel. We believe that the Sacraments which we so greatly prize come down to us in direct and visible descent from Christ and His Apostles. We believe that the Church is the inspired teacher of those truths about love and life and conflict and death which are the chief pre-

occupations of the immortal spirit of man ; which lie at the foundation of God's revelation to man, and of man's experience of God. What has happened then ? For it is clear that many of the forms of the spiritual life which have sprung up around us, but separated from us, ought to be within the unity of the Church. When we have stripped from them whatever is misguided, foolish, false, they are the evidence of our failure to teach faithfully. We who represent the Church have forgotten this or that aspect of the truth, and some other body of men or women has risen up to proclaim it.

In consequence, much of the best and wisest life in England—scientific, artistic, spiritual—has left the Church; and in further consequence, the Church itself, through its members, shows signs of disappointment and weariness. It is easy and true to say that this should never have happened ; that the Church in its members ought to have been wise enough and far-seeing enough to expose what was shallow or false in men's ideas, and to claim, direct, and use the best of the new knowledge as it appeared. This we have at present partially failed to do ; hence the vigorous life which is bursting out all round and outside of us ; often in open conflict with the Church.

It is this partial failure which has cost the Church so much, and leads to the success of materialism, such as it is. We are quick to despise the man who says that when we religious people have agreed to tell him what is true, he will be ready to give it his serious consideration. But there is only too much common sense in what he says.

The question why it is that the Church in modern times has lost touch with so much high and noble thought is properly agitating the minds of serious Christians, whether they be accredited teachers or not. Admittedly we are confused and puzzled. But here and there light comes through. We shall try to look, if only dimly, at some of the directions from which it seems to come.

CHAPTER II

PERPLEXITIES

WE have so far considered the apparent growth in our age, and particularly in our own country, of a tendency towards materialism. We saw that there is much evidence to support belief in such a tendency. But we also thought of the many signs everywhere which seem to show, side by side with the materialistic view of life, ideals which, though not always specifically religious, are yet symptoms of the unquenchable thirst of men for the things of the spirit. But we further saw cause deeply to regret that so much in our age which is generous and hopeful is alienated from the Church of which we are members, and which we believe to be the instrument by means of which the fundamental truths concerning God, the world, and the soul should be mediated to man.

What are the causes of this obvious alienation? And are there any signs which should make us hope that better days may be coming?

THE NEED OF OUR AGE

I suppose that the chief obstacle which has made men and women separate themselves from the Church is the conviction that it has failed to present to the world a conception of God which is adequate to the

fresh scientific knowledge of Himself which He has given to our age. But here arises a point of very great importance. In order to reach a higher conception of God the modern world, including a good many writers on theology and prayer, needs to be making recoveries as well as discoveries.

We have still a great deal more to learn from the ancients than most moderns at all realize. Plotinus and S. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, have much to teach us about the being of God and the nature of spirit which would be exceedingly valuable to some thinkers who have scarcely considered them seriously. These considerations should be carefully pondered by those who would have us, and very rightly, seek for a renewed conception of God. The modern religious world is apt to be unduly contemptuous, and also ignorant, of the wisdom of the past.

Yet when this has been said, the fact remains that thousands of people, especially young people, are profoundly troubled about the impact of science on the religion they have learned. Those who have to help them will do well to consider the two lines of approach : the recovery of the largely forgotten and profound wisdom of the past ; and the attempt to correlate it with the recent advance of modern knowledge.

The greatest need of to-day, as our wisest think, is the regaining of the largely lost power to separate primary and secondary religious beliefs ; to distinguish between those which must be believed by all of us as of first importance, those which are less vital, and those others which may be held by some, but are not necessary for all. And standing out

above all in the first group is the need for a renewed conception of the glory and goodness of God.

Serious people to-day are discovering that the first duty of a human being is to adore God. And because they know that their power to worship depends upon what they think about God, they are driven to use what mind they possess to consider what God is, and such capacity for devotion as they have to pray to Him. So far as their limited intelligence goes, they try to think and worship according to the best they can find of God's revelation of Himself, in the past through tradition, and in the present through the quickened knowledge of the age in which they live.

Those of us who are now in middle life have witnessed a revolution in scientific and historical knowledge which is really unparalleled. I am just fifty ; and I thank God that my life has covered this particular half-century. The great discoveries —evolution, electricity, Biblical criticism, to choose only three of them—were made not long before my birth ; and so it has come to pass that I and my generation have seen the early working-out of them. We can just remember the first telephone, and a little later the first electric tramcar. We have seen vast changes in every sphere of thought and life. There could hardly have been a more enthralling experience than ours in this bridge-period of the world's history.

Persons of ordinary intelligence cannot be expected to have more than a general working understanding of what has been happening, with some special knowledge, perhaps, of one or other of the

departments in which such progress has been made. But let us take as an illustration the story, an old one now, of our changed notion of the world and its creation. Our conception of this part of God's work for man has enormously altered and enlarged. The story of the antiquity, the origin, and the nature of man has passed far beyond our previous thoughts.

When as a child I first began the elementary study of the Bible, the Miltonic conception of creation still held the field in the ordinary family circle, though it was already suggested that in view of the fourth verse of the ninetieth Psalm the period called a day in Genesis might be taken to mean a thousand years. But the Bible presented to me by my godfather (I have it still) on the occasion of my baptism, informed me marginally that Adam the first man was created in the year 4004 B.C. In most families in the 1870's the literal inspiration of the Scriptures was accepted without serious question. There were, it is true, persons on the margin of our world, darkly referred to as atheists or agnostics. There were terrible unbelievers named Huxley and Tyndale and Herbert Spencer, who were writing infidel books attacking the Faith ; but they were being satisfactorily dealt with by Christian champions. As far as I can remember, the old theories were hardly questioned by my teachers.

Even when I was a young priest it was considered necessary to explain very tentatively to congregations that the early chapters of Genesis might without material irreverence be understood symbolically ; but it was thought rather temerarious to express general belief in evolution in the pulpit.

Now all is changed ; even moderately educated persons have a general knowledge of the great extension of scientific thought. God's mode of working in the universe is a different thing from what it seemed to be. We know much, and are learning more as digging and research proceed, of the immense duration of man's existence on this planet. All branches of human study have been remodelled—history, biology, psychology. We see the scope and nature of the divine activity in creation differently.

And yet, it is said, it looks as though religion, or its normal presentation, alone remains unchanged. Every other science, so we are told, has availed itself thankfully of the new knowledge, but the teaching of religion lags behind. This is only partially true. Not only are the stores of ancient learning and devotion becoming more available for men generally ; there are also many preachers and teachers who are faithfully trying to correlate the new discoveries and the ancient faith. But it is also true that a good deal of the presentation of religion as we have it in the pulpit and elsewhere to-day fails to take count of the changes of thought which have come about, and of their effect on Christian teaching. Much speculation, no doubt, is temerarious ; and we know well enough that some forward positions taken up by scholars, say thirty years ago, have been abandoned. But enough remains to make a very thorough rethinking necessary for us. Fundamentalism may not yet be dead, but it is doomed. It does not follow, as some persons reason, that because here and there scholars or scientists see fit to retrace their steps, that we are going back to where we started from.

THE EFFECT OF NEW KNOWLEDGE ON OUR CONCEPTION OF GOD

We have noted above that it is possible to exaggerate the impact of the new scientific knowledge on our conception of God. It may be that those who are contemptuous of tradition, and find it impossible to believe anything which is more than twenty years old, are apt to carry us away with their enthusiasm for making all things new. Yet when such qualifications have been made, it still remains true that much of the re-thinking which is called for from our age must be done at the highest point of our religion. The unprecedentedly rapid growth of our scientific and historical knowledge, though the full import of it is not yet fully realized, must be brought to bear on our thoughts of God and our life of prayer. To a certain extent this is already being done. A great deal of exploration has been made, and the pioneers have set forth their discoveries in books and sermons and lectures.

The Church of England occupies a strong position here. While some other communions during the last four centuries have shown a tendency to define more strictly the content of the Faith, it has retained a remarkable amount of theological liberty. Its toleration of widely different modes of thought has had its disadvantages, and exposes it to the caustic criticisms of more orderly Churches. But we are now beginning to see, and shall see more clearly as time goes on, how thankful we ought to be for this freedom, both to recover the treasures of the past, and to think out the discoveries of to-day un-

fettered by a too rigid authority. Our men and women of learning and prayer are doing great things for us. Our position ought to have made possible a great and notable development ; we should already have given gifts to the whole of Christendom.

But have we ? Yes, in many directions the freedom of our scholars from hampering restrictions has had fine results. But on the whole advance has been rather slow. Controversy has raged round every discovery ; in no sphere of knowledge has over-insistence on tradition been so effective in holding back the pioneers. Ideas wholly inconsistent with good scholarship have by no means been universally abandoned, and a great deal of teaching is given which has little relation with what are now ascertained facts. It is, of course, immensely difficult to correlate the ancient tradition, however true, with the advance of thought and discovery, however firmly based. But men complain, not always without reason, that some of us appear almost to have given up the attempt.

More damaging still, we direct too much of our attention to matters not worthy of comparison with the greatness of the movements going on all round us. Controversies distract us which appear to educated men to be of trifling importance. The layman who has some grasp of what is happening in the modern world, and is trying to apply it as best he may to his religious life, wonders as he sees the leaders of the Church spending themselves in interminable discussion of liturgical points which from the eternal point of view are trivial. It looks to him

as though we were squabbling about the arrangement of our furniture while the house is on fire !

So we get confused, and lose power. So we lose also the love and help of good men and women. The fault, no doubt, is not wholly with us who represent the Church ; the modern man is far from perfect. But enough of it is our blame to make us very penitent. We have got our values wrong ; we are bothering about secondary and third-rate matters when we ought to be seeking for God alone. We ought to be looking for a renewed conception of Him which will be true to the new knowledge and the old ; which will set the old in the new context which God has shown to our age.

THE TWO MAIN LINES OF THOUGHT

The fresh knowledge which has been given to us in our day would seem to show itself religiously in two directions. We have already considered the expansion of our thoughts of this world of ours, and of its setting in the universe. I have neither knowledge nor space to write about this in detail. The science of my boyhood was big ; but compared with what we are now told about relativity, electrons, and kindred matters it was almost domestic. When I remember my childhood's conception of the God of Israel, and compare Him with the God of the modern universe, I am amazed. No doubt this is partly the result of my researches into the riches of the past ; but undeniably much is new, not only to me but to all men. At first the difference seems fatal, catastrophic, horrible. Our little human religion seems

lost beyond recall in the vast machine of the natural universe. So we think.

Yet in actual experience it is not so. When we try to combine the fresh knowledge with the best of what we owe to the ancients ; when we try to make it, so far as we can conceive it, matter for adoration, prayer, aspiration ; we are somehow once more at home. When we consider that the highest human activity is the adoration of God with all our mind, as well as with our other powers, He is near to us again. In prayer, the greatness of God, so far beyond all we once dreamed of, brings not terror but love. We shall return to this point later.

And the second chief result of the scholarship of our day is at first different from and opposite to that of which we have just thought. We have now a knowledge of the *historical* figure of our Lord Jesus Christ such as has hardly been possible since the first ages of the Church. That is not to say that historical understanding is all. He would be a bold man who would claim in our day that he knew our Lord better than S. Francis or S. Teresa knew Him. But we owe an immense debt to the scholars of our day and especially of our own communion for their patient study of the Gospels. The figure of our Lord now stands out unencumbered by masses of devout legend and tradition, no part of the true deposit, which had gathered round Him. There are few studies so entrancing as that of the literature which has lately grown up round the Gospels. In it we get a clear and lovely picture of the Christ. We see again that God is revealed by Him. He expresses in terms of manhood the meaning of

Godhead ; He shows us what it is that the God of the Universe would have man to be.

In one way this is the vindication of orthodoxy. We see that the old tradition is true ; we go back once more to the teaching of the saints, so far beyond the point we have ourselves reached. But in another way we have found something fresh. It is indeed the old Christianity ; but the Figure we see, and the background against which we see Him, are grander than ever for us. We are carried far beyond our petty controversies and our narrownesses, into a freer air. The new light shines on the old, illuminates the old, reveals the inner meaning of the old.

Every serious Christian is occupied in these days in trying to think out as best he may the implications of the great events which have come about in his lifetime. And the whole Church is concerned to lead him in this great quest. But it must necessarily be worked out in the experience of the individual. It must become part of his inner life, and must find itself in renewed powers, first of adoration and prayer, and then of ability to influence others.

We must now turn to see practically some of the ways in which this may be attempted. It only remains to say here that the call to a renewed conception of the greatness of God is as insistent to-day as it has ever been ; that the opportunities before the Church, in view of the movements of the day, are very great indeed ; and that every man or woman who wishes truly to serve God and his generation has his part given to him. This duty must first be worked out in a disciplined life of interior prayer.

CHAPTER III

THE LIFE OF INTERIOR PRAYER

IN the last chapter we made a wholly inadequate attempt to look at the great changes which in the lifetime of most of us have come over our view of the universe, owing to the discoveries of scientists and the researches of historians. We considered particularly our new knowledge of the origin and nature of mankind. This development, together with the clearer understanding of the wisdom of the saints, is carrying with it one consequence greater than any other ; we are seeing a renewed vision of God.

We thought, on the other hand, that in some ways this process moves slowly ; and that the institutional Church is blamed because its teachers are said to have failed to appreciate and set forth the full implications of these two ways of discovery and recovery. And finally we considered that if the Church is effectively to help modern men and women, its teachers must display before them the highest possible conception of Almighty God, the Father, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, through the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Now this re-invigoration of the Christian life for which we have such fine material to hand must first find itself in the individual lives both of the accredited teachers of the Church, and in those of all her

members, be they priests or laymen. Let us attempt, then, more personally at this stage, to apply the thoughts we have been thinking to our own modes of prayer. For it is there that we find God, and it is those only who have pondered on the things of God, in meditation which rises to adoration, who are likely to commend or impart a vigorous faith to others.

Here, as I believe, is the ground of future hope for English religion ; it is not in any one method, but through a great variety of sanctified lives that revival must come. Too many of us are apt to think that by reading, by discussion, by speculation, we shall find a faith which will help ourselves or others. Some put their trust in an almost infallible method. Both are right and necessary, in their place ; but neither is any good without personal experience of communion with God.

On the other hand, there is undoubtedly a new interest in intelligent prayer to be seen in the life of to-day. This is partly the result of the upheaval through which our civilization has passed, and the shattering of our old comfortable, optimistic pre-war world. But it is also the result of close study, which already before the war had entered upon a new stage. There is abundant material to hand for the study of the science and art of prayer.

Those of us who in one way or another are teachers, as well as those who are called upon to influence others in spiritual matters, are compelled to enter upon this study, if we are to be of any use to some of the best of our friends ; and if we are to be at all effective in such work, we must ourselves be persons who at least are seriously trying to pray.

THE STEREOTYPING OF PERSONAL PRAYER

In view of such considerations, we shall think sadly of the almost inevitable tendency to stereotyping in our personal life of prayer, especially as we pass from youth to middle life. Some of us do not realize what is happening, and therefore find ourselves increasingly out of sympathy with other modes of religious thought and prayer than ours. They will seem to us excessive, emotional, sentimental, or else hard and coldly intellectual, according to our temperament and religious habits. In either case we mistrust them ; and so, not only our personal spiritual life, but the prayer life also of such persons as accept our teaching, becomes narrowed down to one tradition.

Others of us see the danger, and honestly try from time to time to get on to fresh lines ; but yet we find ourselves over and over again tending back to the old ground. This may be partly owing to the traditions of childhood. We think that we have long ago emancipated ourselves from the religion of our nursery, and yet still, unknowingly, we hark back to it. The family tradition may be a good one, but it cannot take the place of personal experience. Even liturgy, splendid as it may be, controlling, directing, containing our individual religious life, may also confine it to fixed lines, or may almost take the place of private prayer ; a danger which has notoriously been observed at times in some parts of Christendom. It is a privilege to be born into a great spiritual civilization ; but in prayer the individual must strive to transcend the institution.

In many cases, again quite unrealized, the prayer

is trammelled and darkened by caricatures of God imparted by stern or uneducated persons in early life. The facts may be utterly forgotten, but the effects remain as a canker at the heart of prayer, until they are expelled by a finer and nobler conception of God our Father. And there are many other ways in which the unwatchful Christian may allow his prayer-life to become hide-bound in one shape or another.

So some of us find the spiritual life rather a weary business. We have a dim vision of what we ought to possess, and to be able to give to others. But we are too conscious that being unconvinced ourselves we are unconvincing to those whom we ought to influence. We feel that we are not fresh, and therefore that our religion is unattractive.

And so we come to realize that it is imperative for us to be constantly taking in fresh ideas about God Himself, if our spiritual life is to develop. Moreover, we can only give to others what is real to ourselves. Our own prayer life stands still or grows in proportion as our conception of God stereotypes or enlarges. Let us then try to see how the two lines of advance we shadowed out in the first two chapters of this book may not only lead the whole Church to a richer view of God, but may also nourish the interior spirit of each of us into a stronger and more varied life of prayer.

GOD IN THE UNIVERSE

The new sense of the ineffable grandeur of God which has come to our time is not merely, as we saw, matter for speculative thought (though that is necessary) but also for personal adoration. No doubt there

must always be in the prayer of a human being a solid and inevitable element of anthropomorphism—a picturing of God in some likeness to man. A hundred years ago it was more difficult for the average man to escape this tendency than it is to-day. Yet for vast numbers of people God is still a gigantic man, usually kind on the whole, but also often stern, vindictive, exacting ; who cannot be expected always to live up to the highest standard we look for in the noblest human beings. In many cases this is the unconscious result of that bad teaching in childhood of which we thought a few pages back.

This, though too common a state of mind, is perhaps scarcely the difficulty which faces persons like the readers of this book. Yet how hard it is for us to lift our conception of God above almost crude forms of anthropomorphism. But that, surely, is the first call on our spiritual life ; to make the God we pray to as great as the very best we can know about Him, in His universe, and in His self-revelation in our Lord Jesus Christ.

It was an American lady, I think, who said, ' I accept the universe.' It sounds rather cheeky at first ; but when we think a little further we see what it means. And I suppose that the acceptance of the universe, utterly reverent and adoring, as the work and manifestation of God, is what we first need in our prayer. It was another woman, an English girl about to die, who said,

> No coward soul is mine,
> No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere :
> I see heaven's glory shine,
> And faith shines equal, arming me from fear !

For if God is what we as Christians, trying to pray, and to understand His revelation, believe Him to be, then every fresh accession of His glory realized by us, will not terrify but will delight us, and lift us up to a higher passion of adoration. The intellect and the heart must both be employed, with the other powers, in the nobler kinds of prayer. You remember how Emily Brontë finishes her dying song :

> With wide-embracing love
> Thy Spirit animates eternal years,
> Pervades and broods above,
> Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears.
>
> Though earth and man were gone,
> And suns and universes ceased to be,
> And Thou were left alone,
> Every existence would exist in Thee.
>
> There is not room for death,
> Nor atom that his might could render void,
> Thou, Thou art Being and Breath,
> And what Thou art may never be destroyed.

What a meditation on the splendour of God !

Thus it comes that science, which Christians once thought to be *the* enemy, must somehow be made the friend of our prayer life. It is perplexing enough to work out ; but it is obvious that whatever is true of any part of the being of God is for the Christian lovely and adorable, and matter for the praise of the human mind and heart.

The same is true of the beauty of the earth ; of summer and winter, night and day, seed-time and harvest ; of all the works of the Lord. Through

them unworldly souls see the glory of God, and they knit them up into the heart of their prayer.

So it is with the works which God employs man to make : the grace of a church spire ; the skilful balancing of the vault of a great cathedral ; the marvellous poise and strength of the Forth Bridge ; the discovery and use of sound-waves. All these, too, are matter for the adoration of God, lifting up the single personality to nobler thoughts and a grander manner of life. Happy are those who can find in these, and in music, pictures, poetry, love of friends, ways to the loving praise of God.

These and all other beauties and wonders must be worked into our prayers, so that no part of God's world or God's work may be incapable of calling us to the remembrance of Him ; all must be woven into the life of adoration. Thus we find everywhere the signs of that ' Wisdom which went out of the mouth of the Most High, and reaches from the one end unto the other, mightily and sweetly ordering all things.'

We shall try later to consider more in detail how by gathering all thought and reading, all joy and sorrow, all our experience of life, into our prayer, we shall vary, enrich, deepen it. This is one of the surest ways of preventing prayer from growing dull ; of rescuing it from the dangers of stereotyping or anthropomorphism, from becoming fixed to certain lines. It is this kind of religion which we shall wish to teach to others.

Such in bare outline is the first of the ways in which in the preceding chapter we thought that our conception of God might be renewed. It is for many

persons in the modern world the most attractive method, and suits their temperament. On the whole it is largely intellectual, though tinged with emotion. It is in itself one-sided, but is sane, widening, and stimulating.

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

But there is another side to our religion, which we shall neglect at our grievous peril ; indeed, without which the former is not Christianity at all. For most Christians the personal love of our Lord is the heart, if not the sum, of religion. It may be that this is on the whole true of the simpler souls, the holy and humble men of heart who must always be the great majority of the servants of God. For them the universe, if it were understood at all, would be merely frightening, and the intellectual side of religion a boring impossibility. They are without even the dim perception of the bearings of modern thought which some of us have. It is the human Jesus, in some indefinite sense also God, Whom they love and worship.

Some of us may find it difficult to understand so simple a faith ; but let us remember that babes and sucklings have been held up to our admiration by a very high authority as persons of true wisdom ; and we have been told that of such is the kingdom of heaven. It is very certain that a religious life which is not saturated with the spirit of Jesus Christ is incomplete indeed. We are at one in some of the higher walks of prayer with the experience of the Hindu seer or the Moslem saint ; we share in the rich heritage of the Greek and Roman poets and

philosophers. But for us, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ far surpasses all that is good in other forms of religion and other philosophies of the world. They have their fulfilment only in Him.

And so, while we find deep interest and help in the new science which shows us God's work in the universe, we shall knit it up into the clearer understanding we have of the life and redemptive work of God made Man. Scholarly criticism has cleared away mists which had collected in places around that unique Figure. But He only stands out more vivid and compelling than ever. And as the facts and words and actions of His earthly life are better understood, we see Him against the background of the newly seen universe of the Almighty Father. We see Him as cosmic, eternal, explaining the ways of God to man, bringing God to man and man to God.

I have myself lately found how profoundly a visit to the Holy Land helped me to realize the Incarnation of our Lord. I remember standing on the Temple Area in Jerusalem (one of the oldest sacred spots on earth) and looking across the Kedron valley to where the old track runs past Gethsemane, and winds over the brow of the Mount of Olives towards Bethany. On the way from Jerusalem to Nazareth the modern road goes in great zig-zags through the hill country of Mount Ephraim ; and over and over again it crosses the ancient highway, going straight up and down hill. And I see again in memory the centuries-old path, worn to the white limestone by the generations, which climbs the little valley out of Nazareth to the north—to Cana of Galilee, and down again to Caper-

naum and the Lake ; and as I thought Whose feet had in ancient time trodden those roads, I picked up a pebble or two, in the hope . . .

Well, it may be sentimental, emotional. Yes, but when you link it up with what Christians believe about God and man ; about Jesus and the Gospel and the Church ; when you try to set it all in the context of the universe of the love of God ; above all, when you weave it into your prayer, it goes very deep.

So let us try to bring all this into our adoration of God. Let us see the Manhood of our Lord in the atmosphere of eternity, setting forth the glory and love of the Father.

CHAPTER IV

DISCIPLINE

WE have considered how in prayer we need the combination of two elements ; the adoration of the glory and greatness of God as seen in the universe, and the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ seen against the background of God's works, making God known to man in terms which he can understand. It is needless to say that these are high matters, which soon get beyond the thought of the wisest of us. They also need for their practice the whole of our personality ; the best powers we can give of mind and body, of appreciation and of love. We must now face the question of discipline in the spiritual life.

TWO METHODS OF PREACHING

When in old days a preacher desired to awaken his hearers to sorrow for sin, to a purpose of amendment, and to the life of discipline which makes the new way possible, he would very often speak forcibly of the total depravity of human nature.

' I am a lump of vile polluted clay ' was the cheerful opening of a stirring mission hymn of the latter part of the eighteenth century. Man was set forth as the child of wrath, wholly corrupt, and heading straight for perdition. The fear of hell was incul-

cated by lurid descriptions of the torments of the damned ; and it was hoped, evidently with success of a sort, that such terrors would bring forth the fruits of repentance. It was a method for which the Church is now paying dearly, and will probably continue to pay dearly for a long time to come.

Yet it is scarcely used to-day by men of understanding. It survives here and there ; but now, with better knowledge of God and man, it is dropping out. For it has been found that what moves men to repentance and nobility of life is not the fear of hell, but the thought of the glory and love of God. This, indeed, is nothing new ; it is very old. Did not S. Paul say that ' the *goodness* of God leadeth to repentance ' ? This method is healthier, happier, and much more effective than the other. It is, as we know, being used *mutatis mutandis* in many spheres of human life besides religion.

Yet still most men and women need deliverance, and need it pretty badly, though they may not say so very loudly. We have the ' once-born ' among us, it is true ; those persons of unsullied purity and simplicity of life, for whom the ordinary problems of temptation, sin, and need appear hardly to exist. But if I am to trust my own experience in life, these are the few ; and for most men and women the life-history is of crises, failures, and falls, renewal of life, development of character through tribulation and temptation, as well as, and generally more deeply than, through the pure pursuit of ideals. And therefore, in most of our lives, there is need for constant discipline. Sometimes the discipline is obvious to other people, and comes to us whether we like it or

not. But more often it is hidden from sight, and known only to ourselves. This kind of discipline is one of the first necessities of the life of prayer for most of us. It is also one of the most potent means by which we rise to the adoration of God. It strengthens, deepens, chastens, purifies us.

DELIVERANCE

Let us now consider the meaning of deliverance as applied to the individual life, and more particularly to the personal life of prayer. It is evident, I think, that those who believe in the Christian God can have no peace until they are consciously, to use an old phrase, 'right with Him.' Not perfectly, indeed; but able to feel that so far as they have any power, they are trying to use it on His side, both in their active outer life and in the hidden places of their own spirit. And in most cases—I do not think I am unduly pessimistic—in most cases it means getting right *again* after things have been wrong. In fact, the sense of being forgiven, and encouraged to go forward with renewed confidence.

I dare say this sounds old-fashioned to some of my readers. The once-born are apt to protest against the survival of such concepts in modern days. But if we are to face the facts as they actually are, I believe I am right, and that this is the usual Christian experience. 'Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us . . . looking unto Jesus.' That is a bit of true human life. It is well to forget our failures, except in so far as the remembrance of them enables us to lay our plans more effectively for the future; but, human nature

being what it is, the sense of deliverance and forgiveness is a powerful assistance to healthy forgetfulness.

These are general considerations ; deliverance, spiritual deliverance, comes in fact in many ways. God's dealings with His people are infinitely varied. The sense of liberation of soul will often come after long struggle, but very often, too, it comes suddenly. Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress* had neither hope nor expectation of losing the bundle of his sins at the moment when it fell off from his shoulders. But his liberation was immediately shown by the fact that he went on his way singing. So there are many and various modes of relief.

I should, however, be untrue to a now fairly long experience if I did not testify to the wonderfully liberating effect on very many lives of what is commonly known as Confession, followed by sacramental Absolution. I have found over and over again, in the cases both of young and old people, and perhaps especially among boys and girls, young men and women, that humanly speaking there is nothing else which is so generally effective in giving the sense, as well as the reality, of deliverance from dangerous habits and from the bondage of evil.

There is little need, in these more enlightened days, to apologize for writing on this important subject. The days when ' the filthy confessional ' was a phrase used to prejudice and disgust people has gone by. I find that many eminent doctors now regard it as at least a perfectly normal form of spiritual treatment, which is being used by many of their patients. It is spoken of naturally in discussion by men and women who have the care of other people's

health. Few parents nowadays have any objection to their boys and girls being taught about it, though they dislike the thought of any kind of compulsion being applied in the matter. The public mind is both more open and better instructed than it was about Confession.

No doubt it is a costly experience to make a First Confession. It is often said that one ought to find a confession made to God in private just as difficult and purging as one made in any other circumstances ; but in fact for most people the telling out of one's troubles to God in the presence of any other human being is more humiliating, by far, and also more fully liberating. For the deliverance is also more consciously realized. This, no doubt, is owing to the sacramental nature of what is done ; here we are very near the heart of God's mode of dealing with His creatures.

And, further, it is my experience that when the First Confession is made fairly early in life, sin which might otherwise become a fixed habit, and the cause of great agony of mind, is checked at its first appearance, if not altogether prevented. This is a consideration which should strongly appeal to parents. I can never thank God enough for what I have known to happen in young lives through the help of Confession, wisely and tenderly used. Even if, through evil companionship or some other misfortune, trouble arises, the child knows what to do and where to turn. An infinity of pain, repression, and sadness of mind is thus avoided.

Again, there is the benefit of counsel from another and *ex hypothesi* a more experienced mind. This,

I know, is done, and done effectively very often, quite apart from Confession. But there is a special fitness and facility for ' direction ' in connection with Penance, as it is theologically termed. The penitent is ready and expecting to be counselled, and the circumstances are such that it will readily be accepted and acted upon.

But the greatest boon connected with the practice of Confession is the benefit of Absolution. It is here that it differs from, and transcends, a consultation or a private talk. Those are quite admirable ; and, given confidence between consulter and consultant, are the foundation of most helpful friendships. But Absolution gives the sense of supernatural purification, and of renewed liberty of spirit in the power of divine grace. It is probably unnecessary to point out that all this is finely put in the Book of Common Prayer.

I know well enough that the practice of Confession may lead to abuses of various kinds. Its intimacy and its real value may lead to blundering and worse. The wonderful thing is that tragedies so very seldom happen. But the most careful training and supervision are needed, and are not even yet so fully attended to in the Church of England as they should be. On the other hand, Anglicanism has a magnificent opportunity, to which it is beginning to address itself, of rescuing Penance from dangers of formality or misuse to which it might be subject. There is no real occasion to fear morbidity, or shallowness, or abuse, provided that the discipline be administered with good sense and sympathy by a properly trained ministry.

Lest what has just been written should be considered a digression, I would particularly emphasize the usefulness of Confession and Absolution in the life of prayer, whether it be in the early development of it in the adolescent life, or as a habit in those who are more experienced. The sense of having laid aside every weight and done all that lies in one's power to be at peace with God is of incalculable importance. It destroys the feeling of miserable unworthiness ; it stimulates and encourages us, and frees us to seek Him Whom we desire to love.

THE GENERAL DISCIPLINE OF LIFE

I hope I shall be forgiven if at this point I make two observations which would appear to be merely truisms, but which are of primary moment in the life of prayer.

The first is that we shall none of us get far unless we deliberately treat the whole of life as the context of our prayer, and as the preparation for it. This implies the immediate dropping out of such thoughts, words, and actions as are obviously incompatible with prayer ; and the fostering of such a tone of mind as will be a direct assistance in those times when, going apart or worshipping in common, we consciously approach God.

And, secondly, it is well to remind ourselves of the other truism contained in two lines of a well-known hymn, in which we ask God to ' help us this and every day to live more nearly as we pray.' That is, we must be on our guard against the habit (a very usual one) of praying that certain virtues may be ours, and then deliberately placing

ourselves in such circumstances as will almost inevitably lead to the loss of the good thing for which we pray. This is painfully elementary ; but if we all set ourselves seriously to keep the elementary rules of the Christian life, we should be a good deal better than we are.

I have mentioned these two points because they naturally lead to a more careful consideration of the discipline needed by those who desire to live the life of prayer in the modern world. It is very necessary to think out the matter of the time we give to prayer, regarded as withdrawal from other persons and interests, and employed in quiet waiting upon God. It is, of course, said that all our time should be full of prayer. One man says that he can pray while weeding his garden. So we all ought to be able to do ! We should be capable, without endangering the public, of meditating on eternity while driving a motor car. But this kind of prayer, valuable as it is, is really less difficult than devotion of a more concentrated sort ; and it is immensely developed and stimulated by the discipline of setting apart periods of aloneness and quiet.

The discussion of the things of God with our friends, and particularly with those who are higher on the ascent than we are, is good ; but it cannot take the place of quiet pondering on, and praying out the understanding of, the things of God. We ought, indeed, to talk much more openly and naturally about religion than we do ; but listening to other persons, and even reading the writings of the saints, can only supplement the habit of listening to God Himself directly. Here is the importance of a Re-

treat of three days at least from time to time, say once a year, in which silence is strictly maintained ; of solitary walks in the quiet country, given deliberately to prayer in the widest sense ; of half an hour, or less, or more, spent daily in meditation. I am not inculcating any special mode of mental prayer under the title of meditation, so long as what we do involves some systematic and sustained method of waiting upon God.

Something of this kind is necessary for us all, however busy we may be ; indeed, the more occupied we are, the more we need the discipline of quiet to guard against the danger of dissipation of the spiritual mind, and the silting up of the deeps of our heart. But such systematic, disciplined habits of retirement from business to prayer will be found to develop the gift of ' recollection ' as it is called : of seeing persons, events, decisions, sorrows, as in the atmosphere of eternity, and so of gaining that wider wisdom which is not of this world. The sure result of attaining to such a frame of mind is that half consciously, but inevitably, we impart to others the atmosphere in which we ourselves are learning to live. This does not mean what is called ' piety,' but the full development of the highest gifts of human nature.

DISCIPLINE OF THOUGHT

This is what it means to ' possess one's soul ' ; to be able at will, and without frantic effort, to dwell in thought on such matters as one may choose. This is what is meant by concentration. It is a faculty which is none too common in our busy days. We

find that we can hardly keep our thoughts concentrated for long on any subject, least of all on prayer. We are far too much at the mercy of tyrannous states of mind. We get depressed, and cannot shake off the depression ; it may go on for days or weeks with little alleviation. We find ourselves too easily moved, disturbed, irritable. There is no need to dwell on the pain which comes in these ways, nor of the loss of control, of oneself and others, which results.

But, on the other hand, to be able deliberately to choose one's thoughts ; to decide which are to be entertained as healthy and invigorating ; which are to be excluded as weakening or actually evil ; and to hold to one's choice—this is liberty indeed ! And this is the road to effective prayer, to adoration, to the ability to hear what God says to us. But it implies long discipline of the interior life.

I was at school at Shrewsbury ; and I have tried with too many failures to take as the ideal of life the school motto : ' Intus si recte, ne labora.' It was translated, painted, and hung on the wall of the dining hall of my house. ' If in thine inmost heart 'tis well, fear not, all 's well.' So simple a rule to inculcate, but requiring a lifetime to fulfil.

Yet there it is ; everything for us depends on the discipline of our interior life, in the love of God. And on all of us this duty is certainly laid. It opens the way of prayer to ourselves ; it enables God to make us cheerful and helpful and firm ; chosen servants of His in a difficult and inspiring day and generation.

CHAPTER V

FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF

IT is a common experience in the lives of those who are in any sense regarded as the advisers of others to have persons come to us with some such question as this : 'I have a friend'—often rather more than friendship is involved—'whom I greatly want to help. But he is not a Christian. He was brought up in the Church'—or not, as the case may be—'but he says that he cannot believe as I do. Now I am sure I ought to be able to say what would convince him that the Christian Faith is true. But I am not clever ; I was not very well instructed myself when I was growing up. I am busy, and have little time for reading books. What can I say to my friend which will make him understand and accept the religion which means so much to me ?'

This is a type of a question which often comes up. What advice can be given ? For myself, I try to say something to this effect. Well, you must first realize that you cannot make any person believe in Christianity, or even in the existence of God, by argument, or by any purely intellectual approach. There is no 'knock-out' proof of these great things ; if there were, they would not be great at all. (The wise apologist for religion to-day will be ready to say frankly that neither

he nor any one else can give neatly convincing answers to such mighty problems as, for instance, the origin and power of evil.) But it used to be thought that there were such inexpugnable proofs. In the Middle Ages most persons, even theologians, thought that you could by strict logic make any sane person believe certainly in the truth of Christianity. Indeed, I suppose that until the middle of the nineteenth century there were still many who considered that such proof was possible and valid.

Even when I was young it was darkly suggested by the faithful that those dreadful persons called atheists, however virtuous they might outwardly appear to be, must in reality be in the grip of some hidden sin ; that they were either invincibly ignorant or morally perverted. Or alternatively it was thought that they must be like the devils spoken of by S. James, who ' believe and tremble.' They really are sure that Christianity is true, but their impulses are so incurably evil that they *must* sin, while dreading the almost certain consequences of their misdoing.

That theory has broken down ; for it is obvious that there are non-Christians whose intellect is above our criticism, and whose goodness puts to shame the lives of many professing Christians. If the mind alone were involved, persons of such acute powers of thought must see the truth of the Catholic religion. But the fact is that the mind alone cannot perceive Christianity ; all the human faculties, in their fullest use, are needed here.

This is not to say that there is no intellectual case for Christianity. Thought, the clearest and sound-

est that can be given, is necessary for those whose duty it is to work out the implications of the Church's creeds ; nor in any generation have there been wanting minds of the utmost acumen for this task. But belief does not in the last resort depend only on the mind, or appeal merely to the mind, though this fallacy is too commonly held. Let us therefore consider briefly four lines of approach to Christian belief which may at least start a friendly non-believer thinking again.

First we will think of the postulate of revelation which lies at the heart of Christianity ; secondly of the place and use of dogma ; thirdly of the context of religious faith in the rest of human life ; and fourthly of the spiritual and moral response which must be made by every man and woman who hopes to attain to a living belief in Christ. It will be obvious that nothing more can be done than to draw a general outline of such vast subjects. Every one has to think and pray them out for himself.

THE POSTULATE OF REVELATION

There is no getting away from the fact that Christianity starts with one great dogma, which, reasonable though it be, carries us at once beyond the reach of the unaided human intellect. Our religion rests in the final resort on our belief that throughout history God has been revealing and still reveals to our race certain truths about Himself which we could not have discovered for ourselves.

This is fundamental. The true Christian indeed will be engaged throughout life in searching as deeply as he can into the things of God. But it is

God Who enables him to search at all ; he could have no power in that way unless God were with him. Multitudes of Englishmen and women misconceive Christianity here at the start. Our religion does not begin with man's intellectual seeking for God, but with God's revealing love to man.

This we believe Him to have done by the process known as ' Inspiration ' ; the act of God in ' breathing into ' men and women certain faculties, and making known to them certain facts about Himself, and about His will for them and the rest of the human race. This He has done in such a way that the inspired persons have been and are enabled by speech and writing to pass on the knowledge they have gained, so that it has become the precious and common property of all those who desire to share it. Such men and women have been found throughout the ages, and are found still. And we believe that God revealed Himself supremely in our Lord Jesus Christ, in such measure that further inspiration is only the fuller imparting to man of His spirit and teaching.

As Christians, this is for us a valid expression of truth. We do not deny—we thank God for—other modes by which He prepared for and supplements the classical religious experience of the Hebrew nation. But for us, Christianity is the culmination of God's love. Here we begin ; and while we may deeply admire the evident goodness of non-Christians, we can never palter with this foundation. We rejoice as we see the agnostic statesman founding his policies on the teaching of our Lord ; we thank God when we find an employer working out the

implications of Christianity in his business. But the heart of our faith is that it is a direct and 'supernatural' revelation of the nature of God.

DOGMA

The conception of dogma flows of necessity from the fact of divine revelation ; it issues in theological statements, in doctrines, in creeds. This must be so, though the difference between the Christian who says no more than that he accepts our Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and King, and the other man who believes in an infallible Book or an infallible Church, may be very wide. Still, the idea is the same ; each accepts his belief in the last resort as a dogma based on a revelation of God. The historic Catholic Church, regarded in the widest sense, would say that from the mass of inspired writings certain main positions stand out, and can be stated in words more or less adequate to their importance. There must be some expression in terms of what revelation amounts to, put as simply as possible, in order that it may be available for all and sundry, and not, as is the case in some religions, be a code of secrets known only to the expert or the elect. The chief glory of Christianity lies in the fact that it is a faith for 'babes' ; not only for those who are actually children, but for the simple and unlearned persons who after all form the vast majority of humanity.

The objections to dogma are widespread and definite to-day. No fallacy is commoner than that of the modern man who says he accepts the religion of Christ, but has no use for dogmas. He is generally a good and lovable fellow, who really means what he

says, and is trying to follow the example of our Lord as well as he can. We know what he means. He desires, and most rightly, to see the principles of the Sermon on the Mount applied to daily life. And he thinks that this is the content of religion, as indeed it is religion worked out in daily life. But such a man misunderstands the function of dogma. It seems to him to be hard ; to bind, rather than to give liberty to the soul ; to arrest, rather than to further the free development of the Christian tradition. And admittedly dogma, wrongly used, can do all these things. It may grow sterile, and bind the human spirit ; it may hinder the free course of the truth. But if and when it does these things it is failing of its high office. It is not stating the truth in such a way that it is available for all.

But when the Church is true to itself these things do not happen. They can only be avoided when dogma is not content merely to enshrine a past tradition, but looks for further revelations of God in the present, and hopes for them in the future. The conception of infallibility, whether in a book or in a Church, is dead or dying. Revelation is not static but dynamic, and will always be growing, because God is always carrying on the education of the creatures He has made.

THE CONTEXT OF DOGMA

For dogma has two aspects. Certain truths about God are final. He has, as we believe, Himself revealed them, Who does not change. The great fundamentals remain. But the revelation of God does not cease. It is a matter of pure historical fact

that we know far more about some things which have a great bearing on Christian belief than the early Church had. We dare at last to see that even S. Paul was not infallible, and that some matters which in his day were regarded as of great moment are now changed or abrogated. The mind of man grows under the tuition of God ; he is able to understand more, and more clearly, certain aspects of doctrine. Scholarship modifies here, reinterprets there, something of the previous bearings of the dogma. The context of the Faith changes as the centuries go by ; the mental, historical, scientific, spiritual setting of it varies, so that continually fresh aspects are seen. In fact, legitimate development constantly goes on. This is what makes Christianity, where it is true to itself, the delightfully fresh thing it is, and which enables the Church to bring out of its treasures things new and old.

The dogmatic foundations of Christianity, built on the historic revelation of Himself by God to our race, stand firm. But the building which is raised upon it grows always in size and beauty. The faith given to us by God in Christ is capable of development, growth, correlation to the fresh knowledge He imparts to us in so many ways. We may well be thankful that it is so. There are periods when some things seem to stand still too long ; in nothing is man more conservative than in religion. But always in the end comes re-invigoration by the Spirit of God working through the ages.

It is necessary, then, that every human period should be both conservative and liberal ; holding fast by the essential tradition, while correlating the

best of the new scholarship with the ancient dogma. This is necessary to healthy growth. Where the tradition hardens, the wisdom of the age, God-given, forsakes the institution which stays bound too long ; but when those who speak and act for the Church are led by the Spirit, the new life combines with and refreshes the old.

RESPONSE, SPIRITUAL AND MORAL

But, finally, to return to our friend, neglected too long, who cannot accept the Christian Faith, but who is so dear to us. He is assuredly neither ignorant nor wicked ; but neither is he all wise nor of perfect goodness. What he does not realize is that Christianity is a religion which calls for adventure. It is not enough to expect to be intellectually convinced of its truth, and to reject it if it does not appear to come up to the mark of the modern person's mind. We ourselves are more certain of our faith than of anything else in life. But that is because in our small way we have made the adventure. We have acted upon our belief in the conduct of daily life, and we have found that it is more than true ; it is absolutely necessary for all our needs. But we cannot convey this to our friend if he, on his part, is determined not to make the adventure.

So we have to tell him that he must first *want* Christianity to be true. The trouble is that so many who express disbelief do not really care one way or the other. Life for them is full of a multitude of interests, or of one interest ; so that there is no room left for the Christian religion, nor for any other. But Christianity is a life, a way to walk in ; not a set

of theological propositions or a code of laws, but a manner of living, acting, and thinking. So that our friend—and we ourselves also—must live and act as though Christianity were true, if we want to be sure of it. We must make the great experiment. It is well worth while to make it, and to put into it all the best that we have and are.

For the revelation of God in Christ is to the whole man, the whole woman, and not to the mind only. And here, I know, some of my readers will think they have got me. 'Yes,' they will say, 'what you are really asking us to do is not to think things out as a man should ; not to look at the matter squarely for ourselves, without influence from others, but to suggest ourselves into believing something which is perhaps attractive, but very doubtful. Your adventure is a dangerous one, and not too honest.'

I have tried to deal with self-suggestion in another chapter ; but it is necessary to point out here that, as in matter of revelation, we are again on different ground. If I did not believe that the Spirit of God ruled the world, and guided and directed men's minds, I too might fear auto-suggestion. But I am a Christian, and I believe that the Holy Spirit dwells in me, to rule the movements of my life, if I will let Him do it. How, then, can I be afraid that I may suggest myself into a way of life which is virtuous, perhaps pleasant, but illusive ? Here, I admit, is a real and fundamental difference between a believer in Christ and one who does not believe in Him. Here, again, there is no knock-out proof ; only experience can convince. And in all our dealings with the friends who find faith so difficult we must

take this vital fact into consideration. If not, we shall both be disappointed.

For in fact as we believe, Christianity, or rather our Lord, calls for a spiritual and moral response, in prayer and life. It may not be in the least true that an unbeliever is a man of evil life ; but it is true that a person who deliberately commits serious sin will find increasing obstacles in the way of religious belief. And if we are not ready to make a spiritual and moral response to the grace of God, it is likely that all will pass over us, unheeded because totally unrecognized. It is true, but we have ruined our faculty for understanding it. Without high adventure on our side, intellectual conviction, even if it were possible, would be valueless. The heart and the will, as well as the mind, are deeply involved here.

What *we* have found is that the revelation of God in Christ is infinitely rich, varied, delightful ; but that if we are to enjoy it we must make an unreserved offering of ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice, which is our reasonable service. This in the last resort is the ground of our Christian belief.

CHAPTER VI

ORIGINS OF PRAYER

THIS chapter must be regarded as no more than a few notes on a subject of the first importance in modern religion. It is to be hoped that some scholar with half a lifetime to spare will give himself to an examination of the origins of prayer. It might well be his *magnum opus* to extract the gold of adoration and supplication from the quartz of magic and folk-memory in which, from the human point of view, it is historically embedded.

In my prouder moments I claim to be one of the few persons in England who have read through *The Golden Bough* (excluding the Index and Bibliography) without skipping ! I mention this fact in order to show that at least I am aware of more than I can put down here ; and I make this preface to a chapter too pretentiously entitled ' Origins of Prayer ' merely in order to avert criticism of so paltry an attempt to write on one of the profoundest subjects with which the mind of man can deal.

The origin of prayer is God, and the purpose of prayer is the seeking of God. Any consideration of prayer must begin with the postulate that the power to pray is given, not self-invented, and therefore for us who are Christians it is the vainest of endeavours

to seek in man's history or in pre-history, or in the absorbing study of anthropology, for the origins of prayer. For us the history of devotion is the story of God seeking man, and calling to man to seek Him, of God revealing Himself at 'sundry times and in divers manners unto the fathers.' And though we should regard the Old Testament fathers of the famous and God-taught Hebrew race as pre-eminently the prophets of God, yet we are less and less inclined to restrict God's revelation to them only, or even to those whom the Church has long been accustomed to think of as 'souls naturally Christian.' For we find in men and races far removed from the Hebrews, and even from the Greeks and the Romans, the signs of God's revealing love. We can see dimly in pre-history and all through historical times everywhere both God's hand outstretched to help, and God's mind touching the mind of man. But we can see also in a thousand strange ways, which we are only now beginning to understand, man's groping about to respond to the seeking and the grace of God. Man may have been only very dimly conscious of a power greater than himself, but looking back, as we can now look back, over centuries reclaimed in part from oblivion, our contempt for pagan religions and practices is being considerably modified.

MAGIC

Brilliant attempts are made to-day to convince us that we are to find in magic rites, for which we have a growing mass of evidence in past ages, and which we are also studying with the closest care in existing primitive races, the real origin of prayer. Primitive

man sees everywhere, we are told, the evidence of spirits other than his own. He notices the wind stirring the leaves of the tree ; he sees the moving waters and the blaze of the fire ; he hears the terrible thunder : and he attributes to each a kind of life he could not clearly define, and which we find it very difficult to define for him, for we cannot accommodate our sophisticated minds to his elementary thoughts and concepts.

We see, however, that man very early in history began the attempt to bend to his own use the forces of nature by means of that which we call magic. The essential idea of magic is, that by performing certain outward rites, you can cause certain consequences to happen, which for some reason or another you consider desirable. Reason and will have little to do with magic. You do not supplicate some divine person to grant certain gifts, but you compel or persuade some power, willing or unwilling, to do what you want done.

Let us take some instances. Primitive man depended more obviously than we do on the weather for his immediate food supply. Drought or continual rain for him would probably mean disease and starvation on a large scale, and almost at once. If, therefore, there were a persistent downpour of rain, he would light a great bonfire on the top of the highest hill in his neighbourhood, or roll down-hill wheels which had been covered with dry straw and lighted. His idea was that the sun, seeing the blaze of the flames, would say to himself, ' But I can do far better than that,' and would at once come out and shine. Or suppose that the pitiless heat were

scorching up the fields and ruining the harvest ; a man clad in green clothes or leaves, or a tree from the forest, would be brought into the middle of the village, and water cast upon him or it. Here, again, the idea is that the watery powers, beholding the splash of the water, would, like the sun, say, ' But I can do better than that,' and down would come the rain.

The varieties of magic are endless. Other ceremonies are concerned with hunting, with child-birth, with the kingship, the priesthood, and many other aspects of life ; but the underlying idea is the same. It is expected that if certain rites are performed, certain consequences must of necessity follow. Nothing is more strange about magic than its survival in the face of frequent and often inevitable failure.[1]

It is claimed by some teachers to-day that magic, after all, is the origin of prayer. As civilization has proceeded, we are told, man's whole conception of the world and the way in which it was made and is governed has developed. In the same way, his mind has travelled far from the idea of vague natural forces which could somehow be compelled to unwilling obedience. So through the mighty march of the ages has evolved in the human mind the lofty conception of an eternal, almighty, loving God and Father, to Whom prayer may be addressed, and from Whom an answer may rightly be expected. But this, it is said, is a beautiful delusion. Man has brought out of his own inner consciousness this fairy

[1] For an extensive discussion of this vast subject, read *The Golden Bough* by Sir James Frazer, O.M.

tale of the centuries. In reality you can find back in pre-history the original germ out of which all this theology has naturally developed. It is further maintained that mankind has passed out of the stage of magic into that of religion, and that he is now passing out of the religious age into the only true explanation of God, the world, and the soul, which is natural science.

I am not very much afraid of these contentions, plausible as they are, and beautifully as they fit in with one view of the history of man. I am not cast down when I find 'in the dark backward and abysm of time' many strange likenesses to prayer and sacrament. That is because it seems to me a far more consistent explanation of history and pre-history, as I know them, to conceive God as already at work, speaking and calling man to Himself as man could understand Him, long before the age of developed religion.

There was, no doubt, much darkness and superstition in primitive magic; but it seems to be a rudimentary stage in the preparation of the human race for the profound and satisfying practice of prayer. So when the learned anthropologist seeks to destroy my faith by showing me parallels here and there between primitive rites and conceptions and my prayers and sacraments, I am not daunted, but encouraged. I am told, for instance, that my religion, and particularly the Catholic form of Christianity, is saturated with the atmosphere of dark ages long gone by and forgotten; with primitive rites, and remnants of magic. Indeed, I admit that it is possible for prayer and sacrament to-day to be so

regarded as to give too much colour to this contention. We cannot deny, I think, that here and there, even in the modern Church, there are teachings and beliefs too dangerously near to magic. This probably is inevitable while there are still dark places where ignorance and cunning exist.

But it does not follow, because here and there you may find dark survivals from the age of magic that therefore the theology of the Christian Church is tainted. The Church has in fact taken over many primitive ideas, which are imbedded deep in man's experience ; but she has purged them of their magical content and sanctified them for the use of a faith emancipated by God from the darkness of superstition. When I find these parallels and survivals in consecrated form in my own religion, it seems to make it not less credible, but if possible even more interesting than before. I love to think that my faith and prayer are rooted far back in the history of the race ; and that God Who has taught me so much from the past will teach far more to those who come long after me. That does not mean that I do not try to keep my eyes fixed on the future. I do. But I find the darkness of the future is partly illuminated by the experience of the past.

THE SACRAMENTS

We may, however, go further, and illustrate such theories by our knowledge of the Christian Sacraments. Any one who studies these in connection with general human history will see at once that they have deep pre-Christian roots. Long before our Lord gave us Christian Baptism, man had grasped the idea

of interior purification symbolized by outward cleansing with water. It may have been in the first place a rain charm. We find it in the Greek and Roman religions, and in nearly every other form of primitive faith in one shape or another. It is an almost universal religious idea. But our Lord came and took this symbol of ceremonial cleansing and exalted it into the Christian Sacrament of initiation—'a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness'—'by which I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.'

Or consider the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Any reader of books on anthropology knows how universal is the idea among primitive races that you can gain fresh strength for yourself by partaking of, and sharing in, the life of some person, dead or alive, nobler, braver, stronger than yourself. By such a rite your life becomes one with the life that you desire to share. It cannot be denied that some of these ceremonies were dark and barbarous in the extreme—so horrible indeed that they must be kept to the pages of scientific books—yet who can deny that the underlying idea is a noble one?

Then our Lord came. He took the common bread and wine. He gathered His friends round Him. He blessed and sanctified the gifts of the earth—the common bread and wine—and said 'This is My Body. . . . This is My Blood.' So He deeply spiritualized and perfected what was fine in the older rites. He desired and desires that we may be partakers of His life, infinitely nobler, braver, stronger than our own, 'that our sinful bodies may be made clean by His body, and our souls washed

through His most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in Him, and He in us.'

But further ; He took the common, everyday meal, at which the bread and wine were eaten and drunk, He grouped the disciples round the common table, and taught them that they were not only sacramentally one with Himself, but that in the fellowship of His life they were also united one to another.

And, again, He took the necessary union of man and woman, by which mankind is increased, the mutual vow of love and loyalty, and blessed this also by His word. So we believe through the Holy Spirit working in the Church He made it into a sacrament, showing forth the mystical union which is between Christ and His Church. And so on. The Christian and Catholic Sacraments are everywhere connected with the ancient past and with the common things of ordinary life ; but these are made the symbols and vehicles of something immeasurably great. So we get these holy things deeply rooted in pre-history and history, but uplifted, sanctified, and used by the Son of God for the benefit of God's children.

So we reach the great question. Are prayer and sacrament debased when they are conceived as thus appearing and developed ? I for one cannot think so. It seems to me entirely beautiful and fitting, and consistent with everything else that I know of God's ways to man. There is indeed the danger, at which I hinted a few pages back, that we should fail to take our personal prayer and sacraments out of the region of magic into the light of Christianity. We must indeed be watchful and resolute to see

that our view of God and religion is utterly purged of all that is mechanical or dark in past history.

The effect of the prayer or sacrament must always depend on the right disposition of the person who prays or receives. We are children of Christ and of His Spirit. We must 'cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light.' We are accused of believing that a man who receives one of these means of grace will become good, or get some other advantage, without any corresponding virtue or movement on his own part. That would be exactly magic. If we did believe anything like that, we should indeed be back in the dark ages. But such a belief is clean contrary to the teaching of the Church as it is found, for instance, in the Book of Common Prayer. It is perfectly clear there that no sacrament can do any one the least good unless there is the fullest correspondence in his own spirit. Faith and penitence, the desire to amend and to live according to the Christian standard[1]; these are requisite for those who would receive the Christian sacraments. Without them the sacraments are nothing. The man may be touched by the outward sign, but he is in no sense at all received and blessed by our Lord. Let us be sure of this, not only that we may be able to defend our faith and sacraments from attack, but also that we may ourselves be interiorly prepared for the receiving of them.

ANOTHER VIEW OF THE ORIGIN OF PRAYER

There is yet another way of approaching the origin of prayer as it appears in the history of man.

[1] See the last Question and Answer in the Church Catechism

It has lately been urged[1] that the view of prayer and sacraments as emerging only or chiefly from magic is not even scientifically sound. It is said that while this theory accounts for certain aspects of prayer, it leaves out of account altogether certain religious experiences common to primitive and modern man. It is maintained that even if you exclude the more definite idea of the self-revealing God, there is a nobler beginning of human religion than that which finds it only or chiefly in magical rites. Even primitive man has higher conceptions of the divine than have been put to his credit. We find that the sense of something other than himself leads man to feel in what we now call religion an experience thrilling, inexplicable, better than mere animism, something for which you cannot account by magical rites.

We ourselves feel about our spiritual life that it all gets clean outside our best reasoning and our nicely ordered groups of ideas. We have the sense of a power incapable of being tamed or brought into conformity with our notion of how things ought to be. Man has always felt in some form this indescribable intuition about the unseen. We say that it includes fear ; and though the word fear does not express what we mean, there is in it the sense of awe, mystery, majesty, power, beyond our thinking.

And this something deeply interfused with our world and our life, while it stirs our awe and our fear, yet fascinates and allures us ; for besides the mystery and the majesty, there are the conceptions of love, pity, mercy, comfort, in what, for want of

[1] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*.

better words, we call the Being of God. All this is beyond our reason. When we have done our best, and we must do our best, to *understand*, to rationalize, there yet remains the vast element which eludes our classifications, and is incapable of being brought within the terms of our mind.

Now, if we in this later day, who after all are immensely developed mentally and religiously, are still baffled by such intuitions of the universal, much more could primitive man not account for them. Yet it is clear that he too was conscious of more than that merely useful side of the unseen which could be compelled magically to work for his advantage. He too felt something of this awe, this mystery, majesty, power, this love, pity, mercy, comfort. And this sense of immortal life deeply affected primitive ideas of religion, making it in many ways a purer thing than the exponents of the magic theory would have us to suppose.

CONCLUSION

Finally, let us try to see how these two elements of which we have thought combine with others too many to be dealt with, in forming the human side of the origin of prayer. We are the descendants of those primitive folk of whom we have been thinking. Their blood is in our veins, their thoughts helped to form our minds. For all of us there is a direct line of ancestry through the old stone age, and the new stone age, and the bronze and iron ages, down into historical times.

A year or two ago I visited a certain place in Berkshire called ' Seven Barrows.' There in a remote

downland valley are twenty mound-graves of the ancient dead. As I wandered from one to the other across the primeval turf the owner of the land approached me, and asked what I was doing there. 'Visiting the tombs of my ancestors,' said I, pointing to the barrows. He stared at me, and rode away without a word.

In a broad sense I was right; the same blood flows in my veins which warmed those folk three or four thousand years dead. There must have been much in their thoughts, their love, their religion, which has come down to me from them. In me, no doubt, those elements are immensely developed by grace, and by the fresh revelation of God in our Lord. Yet our Lord Jesus Christ did not found a new order of life; He used what He found already in the world in giving us His pure and holy teaching. The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has been for centuries working out the implications of God's revelation of Himself to man.

Let us learn, then, to see in outward things manifestations of God. Where our primitive forefathers saw spirits moving in the leaves, flowing with the water, roaring in the thunder, we see a world of beauty which partly hides and partly reveals the unimaginable loveliness of God. We are always to be ready to find Him breaking through, manifesting Himself in the outward things. Some of our closest experiences have come in that way. Those people are happiest who most often and most clearly find that every common bush is afire with God.

But there is something more. There is the piercing sense of awe and mystery, majesty and splendour,

of pity and love and comfort. These are eternal in the human soul. And these are the origins of prayer. They descend to us from our far-off fathers, long since dead ; they live in our own hearts as the foundation of all that is best in us. Whatever may have been the process of their evolution, they lie very near the heart of God's message to man, and of man's answer to God's love. Let us look to our origins, to the rock from whence we were hewn, and build on that foundation a worthy temple of the interior life.

CHAPTER VII

OUR THOUGHTS ABOUT GOD

GROWTH in the power of prayer, whether in the human race or in the individual, must always go side by side with advance in the knowledge of God. When our conception of His glory ceases to develop, our prayers become stale ; while every fresh accession of knowledge, in whatever way it may come, inevitably issues in a deepening of our life of prayer. It will constantly happen that we are unable to express newly gained knowledge of God in formulated prayer. We must try, therefore, to face in fuller detail our conceptions of God ; the thoughts we think about Him, the ways in which we are in fact seeking to find Him.

Two points arise here. The first is that the conception of God has evolved, and can be seen evolving, right through human history. I use the word 'evolve' without prejudice, to describe for the moment God's method of revealing Himself gradually to man, as man was able to bear the unfolding. And the second point is that the human race has not moved forward, and does not move forward, uniformly in this supreme science. We should expect that knowledge once gained by any human being would soon become the possession of the whole race, to be held universally in common. This is not

so. Knowledge gained is sometimes largely lost again ; while the mass of men in every age is spiritually below the level of experience gained by others centuries earlier.

THE GOD OF THE HEBREWS

God's purpose in revealing Himself to man progressively as man could understand is beyond our power to fathom. It is one of the great theological re-discoveries of the last fifty years or so. When we thought that we had to equate Genesis with natural science, or the God of Deborah with the God of S. John ; when we had to reconcile the Old Testament idea of God with the Christian conception, we were indeed in parlous difficulties. A great many of the problems which overwhelmed the faith of the mid-Victorians would never have existed if they had realized what we know—that God's teaching about Himself has to be adapted to man's capacity of reception.

We are now able, some of us at any rate, to read the Old Testament approximately in the order in which it was written. Certain questions of criticism stand out, but we can be pretty clear now about the chronological succession of the writings, and of different parts of the same writings. So we find that some of the books which stand far down in the order of our Authorized Version are in fact much more ancient than those which stand earlier. We can thus trace the order of development. We witness a slow growth from a very elementary conception of God, through a series of fresh openings up of the divine mind until the world was ready for the

supreme revelation when God spoke to us through His Son.

As we study the Old Testament we cannot disguise from ourselves that God, as the early Hebrews were able to think about Him, is gravely out of character with much of which we are quite sure to-day. As we read we find Him often capricious, revengeful, unreasonable, indiscriminating, unjust. There is no doubt much that is holy, righteous, severe about the Israelitish conception of God ; and yet we must admit that many actions reported of Him by the sacred writers would outrage the religious sense of quite ordinary Christian people to-day.

He is represented, for instance, as ordering indiscriminate massacres of men, women, and little children, and even of harmless cattle. He sends out Jehu to slay scores of unfortunate and no doubt delightful young men and boys, whose only crime was that they were the sons of Ahab. He is not thought of as the universal God at all. He is a local God of the Hebrews, just as Moab and Edom and Ammon also have their fully existing local gods. David, for instance, complains that Saul has driven him from Jehovah's country, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' Naaman's motive in asking for two mules' load of earth from the prophet Elisha is not commonly realized by persons who hear that magnificent chapter read in church. The idea was that he could only worship the God of Israel on Israelitish ground, and must therefore carry off, and empty out in his own country, so much of the soil of Israel as would suffice for an altar to Jehovah. And Queen Victoria was much in advance of her time in wondering that

David should be called a man after God's own heart.

Now it is all very well to say that God had to vindicate His righteousness and justice in a barbarous age ; but we cannot get out of it in that way. The fact is that the conception of God in such early books as Samuel or Kings is a barbaric and primitive conception, totally out of harmony with ours. We need not think that the God we know is responsible for the savageries of those wild times. It is true, no doubt, that the revelation—and again it is a mystery that it should be so—could only proceed in that way. The Israelites of the first settlement in Palestine and of the early Kings could not have understood anything else. And here we may note with joy the enormous progress in Old Testament times. The gulf that separates the Israel of Joshua and Judges from the exquisite visions of Isaiah or the thoughts of Job, is tremendous. On the other hand, nowhere is the contrast greater than between the profound devotion of some of the psalms and the barbarous vindictiveness of others. It is strange to us that these elements often stand side by side in the same psalm. The variations almost throughout the Old Testament between lofty and exceedingly low conceptions of God cannot be missed by any intelligent reader.

MODES OF GOD'S REVELATION

Here, then, is another point we need to emphasize. Every now and then, in ways quite inexplicable, and apparently unforeseen, God makes a fresh revelation to man ; and He does it through some man or

woman, or some group of persons. Rare spirits appear who are trained to be the channels of God's further revelation of Himself to man. Again and again the new knowledge comes as a shock to the generation which receives it. It is stubbornly withstood ; sometimes the prophet dies as a martyr of the new knowledge. But the following generations build the sepulchres of the prophets. The good news cannot be suppressed, and the knowledge of God moves forward.

The most illustrious of these elect souls in the old days are the prophets of Israel, a splendid group of men on fire with God, and used by Him to give, first to their race, and then to the world, a new, and until their day an unknown, vision. I never can understand the blindness of people who belittle the Old Testament. The longer I live, and the more I study it, the more magnificent it grows. The poetry of the second Isaiah, or of the Book of Job, are only the finest flowers of a series of books of enchanting romance from the literary point of view alone. To us they are far more than fine writing ; yet in our day pagans are reading and loving them, and Catholic Christians are setting them on one side as hardly worthy of notice.

Such men as these prophets gave something new to the human race in the loftiest part of its experience. If all Christians had attained to the spiritual insight of Isaiah or Ezekiel, the Church to-day would be very different from what it is. They have left far behind the primitiveness of Samuel or Elijah, great as those men were, and dramatic as is the story of their doings.

It is impossible really to understand the New

Testament or to see the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ as God means us to see it unless we are already acquainted pretty fully with the teaching and meaning of God in the Old Testament. Then we see the Incarnation in its true setting, and from the historical point of view. This only adds to its value and its interest.

If we are thinking little just here about the New Testament, it is partly because we shall be going back to it later, and also because I take it for granted at the moment as the record of the supreme revelation of God. The rest of history, present and to come, can only be the working out of the implications of Christianity. Nothing is more interesting than to notice in much of our public life to-day the beginnings of dim realization that this is true.

But, as in pre-Christian days, so since, God still uses men and women as instruments of His further revelation. Great names leap to our minds ; not only those whose writings are included in the Canon of Holy Scripture, but those also who have carried on the development—Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, à Kempis, to name only three of the great host. These, too, have brought God to man. He has spoken to them also, and they have written down their experiences for the ages to come.

The unevenness of man's apprehension

Yet how astonishing is the failure of so many men and women to apprehend the developing conception of God ! Although the writers of the second part of the Book of Isaiah, of the Book of Job, of the Psalms, have spoken and have made the revelation of God

as they knew it the common property of well over two thousand years ; though God has revealed Himself so clearly in the Person of Jesus Christ ; though the great Christian writers have drawn out in a hundred ways the meaning of that revelation : yet many, perhaps even most, men and women are still back in the Old Testament frame of mind ; many indeed are far below the best that the Old Testament writers knew. Whatever the professions of these people may be, their religion in fact is exceedingly crude.

I suppose that some of the most shocking parts of the Old Testament to modern Christians are the so-called Imprecatory Psalms. There are passages in some of these psalms, indeed whole poems, so utterly out of keeping with the Christian spirit, that many persons to-day desire that they should not be used in Church services. Indeed, I have noticed that when such a psalm as the one hundred and ninth is said at Evensong, many devout persons cannot, and do not, say their verses. Yet the one hundred and ninth psalm reflects perfectly truly the writer's conception of God's view of his enemies.

There are even persons still who can take such words literally. During the war I remember hearing a much respected parish priest say publicly that he could not understand why people objected to the Imprecatory Psalms. ' After all,' he said, ' is that not exactly what we feel about the Germans ? ' Many others, who exclaim at the dreadfulness of the sentiments they find in many parts of the Old Testament, live and act rather too consistently in accordance with the way of life there set forth.

There is still another side to the mystery. Many, as I say, are still living in the atmosphere of Old Testament religion ; but there are crowds more to whom spiritual ideas appear to convey little or nothing. If you ask the ordinary man to give his opinion of some classical book on prayer (supposing he can be induced to read it), he will say that to him it is utterly dull. In most libraries the dustiest, least read books are those on theology ; that is to say, those which deal with the science of the knowledge of God. Others, again, fly from the big books, which really go to the root of the matter, and content themselves with little easy books of devotion, with slight and popular treatises on great subjects, with cheap tracts, popular newspaper articles, and the rest. It really is all very strange ; but it is very serious, because it means that many Christians have a quite inadequate conception of the Being of God.

This holds us all back. We have, as we have seen, the explorers of the country of God, the pioneers who break into the unknown, and come back to tell us of the wonders they have found there ; but so few follow them. It is as though some one who had discovered a new and beautiful land, of rich soil and abundant in mineral wealth, came back to his own poor and overcrowded country, and begged his fellow countrymen to go with him and colonize the new land ; and they would not. So it is too often with us. The rich land of the spiritual life lies open and ready. It has been discovered and mapped ; we have heard about it, but we do not enter it, and live there in the riches and beauty of the newly discovered country of God.

MEANS OF ATTAINMENT

Now, if we are to desire and to be able to enter into the land of God, there must be that true conception of Him which will make us long to seek Him in our true native land. I propose, therefore, to end this chapter with the mention—for indeed there is room for little more—of some of the many gates which lead us into the celestial city. We can each meditate upon them, think and pray them out for ourselves. Many I know are doing so already ; but the possibilities here are literally infinite. What the person most experienced in spiritual things has already found is as nothing compared with what remains yet to be discovered.

And, *first*, let us saturate our minds with the Word of God ; with the noblest literature the world has produced, the guidebook and the map of the country where God dwells. Let us read our Bibles, Old Testament and New Testament. We may be glad that this is done more than it was, but it should be done intelligently. There should be little need to point out that the Bible is a very difficult book. Yet it is impossible for the ordinary Christian to reach a true conception of God unless he is continually studying the Holy Scriptures. And further, it is wise to study them with the aid of a good commentary. Why should we not avail ourselves of the best scholarship brought to bear on the finest spiritual literature of which we stand possessed ?[1] Those persons are happy indeed who are able to study their New Testament in Greek.

[1] Such as *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture* (S.P.C.K.).

We shall study with one end in view. It is not only that the historical interest is very great, and throws much light on Holy Scripture, though that is true : but what we want is to get at the heart of God's revelation of Himself. We want to know Who and What He is, what He does, and how, and as far as possible why ; what is His will for the world and for us. We want to see Him as prophets and heroes, martyrs and saints, have seen and loved Him; as Isaiah saw Him, as Job learned from Him, as S. Paul and S. John wrote of Him. We want to learn what those men who saw and talked with Jesus understood about Him. We want to ponder on every word of His. Let us put away the little books and get back to the biggest book of all. We need to. I heard once of a good lady who delighted in the *Spiritual Journal of Blessed Joanna Mary* ;[1] but when she was recommended to read the New Testament, said, 'Oh, Father, it is so dull !'

And, *secondly*, let us look for God in His works. Those who live in the towns ought to take their holidays in the hills or by the sea. If Switzerland or Italy are not possible, there are the Lakes, or Malvern, or Dartmoor, or Wales, near enough at hand. Nowhere is the spiritual revelation of God in the earth more beautifully expressed than in Keble's *Christian Year*. It is, I fear, little read now ; but those who go back to it, or those who read it for the first time, will feel, I think, that nature and grace are here marvellously intertwined. The love of the hills and the sea is no modern craze. We have our Lord's own example for it. He often went up into

[1] An imaginary book with a typical title.

the mountains. He stayed there sometimes whole nights in prayer with God. In the New Testament we often find references to a desert place, a quiet, wild country place, where God might be sought and found. Our Lord had to have solitude. He must get away sometimes, even from Peter and James and John, good companions and faithful friends as they were. And we, too, if we are to find God, must sometimes leave behind our best-loved friends. It is good to go for a walk with one of them. It is sometimes better to leave them at home, or to go another way, if we are to find the best Friend of all.

And, once more, we must make our Retreat, and make it regularly. Sometimes it is possible and delightful just to go quietly into the hills or by the sea ; but wherever it is, the silence is what we need. In the rush of life we cannot hear what God wants to tell us about Himself and about ourselves. In the hush of a retreat, in the holy quiet, so different from simple silence, we can hear ; and though we must return into the rush of life, we come back having heard, and with new knowledge. Something permanent has been added to the experience which is of all the best worth having.

For, *thirdly*, we must all face one fact. If we are to enlarge and deepen our conception of God and our life of prayer, it really does mean a far more serious effort than we have yet made. The best of us get only a small way, and most of us are really playing at it. If we ask ourselves what proportion of our time, our interest, our personality, we do, in fact, give to the deepening of our conception of God, we

are bound to blush with shame. This is a very serious matter. We go to our confessions with all the little peccadilloes and small sins and omissions. But these are not what matter. It is our neglect of the science and art of adoration which, for most of us, is the foundation sin. We must compare ourselves once more with the great men of the Old Testament. We take it for granted that we have far surpassed them in the possibilities of the spiritual life ; but do we really know as much as they did ?

> What bard,
> At the height of his vision, can deem
> Of God, of the world, of the soul,
> With a plainness as near,
> As flashing as Moses felt,
> When he lay in the night by his flock
> On the starlit Arabian waste ?
> Can rise and obey
> The beck of the Spirit like him ? [1]

We may say that Moses was a primitive—Isaiah, the Book of Job, S. John and S. Paul, the Gospels, the Name of Jesus, were unknown to him—but have we, who know so much, entered into the treasures of God as he did ? So let us end this chapter on a note of austerity. We talk a great deal to-day about the need of gaiety in religion. We say that we can laugh and joke and still love the Faith. We love to feel that true Catholicism is full of humour. Yes, that is right enough no doubt. But I think we have come to the time when we need a new seriousness.

[1] Matthew Arnold, *The Future*.

We have laughed almost enough. True joy is compatible, it necessarily goes with, a very serious austerity of life. We are apt to forget this. But no way of life calls more clearly for this holy seriousness than that which is trying to widen and deepen the conception of God which dominates our prayer.

CHAPTER VIII

ON SUGGESTING ONESELF

WE are often warned to-day to be on our guard against auto-suggestion ; we are not to allow ourselves to be taken in by the idea that things are happening outside of ourselves, when really they are unconsciously self-produced. In particular we are warned to take care about self-suggestion in prayer. Many people think, and are teaching others to believe, that prayer is really no more than auto-suggestion, carried to a greater or lesser degree according to the capacity of the individual. We are told that there is no one who hears and answers prayer, and that if things seem to come about in our interior life as we pray they may, it is we ourselves, and no outside power, who have produced the happy effect.

This thought has reacted so disastrously on many people to-day, especially young men and women, that they have given up praying altogether. It has always been difficult enough, they feel, to find God in prayer ; and it seems a plausible explanation of the difficulty to suppose that after all He is not really there. And if He does not hear, why go on with so costing an exercise as prayer certainly is ? Or, if they do not altogether give up, the haunting suspicion that it is all self-suggestion takes the heart out of prayer. It is hard enough even if you are sure that

God hears prayer ; but if it is more than possible He does not, well, what is the good ?

Now the very heart of Christian belief is the certainty of that loving understanding by which God can be in touch with us, and we with Him. If we cannot believe that the heart of human life consists in the fact that the God Who made us is always trying to get through to us ; and further, that He has given us the capacity, haltingly indeed, to get through to Him ; if this is untrue, then all is gone.

To me I must confess it seems far harder to believe that I can perform such a miracle as self-suggestion than to believe that God can. I mean, when I consider all the facts ; when I think of human life as it really is, and what I know about this world, and the universe in general, it seems easier to suppose that there is a God Who hears and helps, than to believe that the whole wonderful achievement of men and women in prayer is their own doing. And here we must remember that in considering this question we must not think simply or first of our own poor efforts in the way of prayer. We must bear in mind all the time the very best that men and women have ever done. Any one who is acquainted with the literature of prayer will agree that, however it has happened, it is the history of a marvellous and portentous human achievement.

Yet I do not claim that I or any one else can give any ' knock-out ' proof that prayer is not auto-suggestion. Like so many of the greatest things in life, it will always elude such exact demonstration as will convince the unbeliever. To myself, however, it is the surest proof of the existence and love of God

that I have this amazing power at all. I regard it as God's greatest gift to me that I should be able to put myself (I use such terms without prejudice) into a state of mind in which I can transcend altogether the limits of the common world and find myself in another and a better country, while still living here on earth.

THE USES OF AUTO-SUGGESTION

I would maintain, therefore, that the power of suggesting oneself is a very good power, and capable of incalculable use. We all remember how a few years ago the whole world was carried away by the teaching and practice of auto-suggestion for the purpose of healing. However much the popular craze may have died down, it is becoming always more generally recognized that if one can really persuade oneself that one is better, that 'day by day in every way I grow better and better,' the desired result is rather likely to come to pass. Most people of intelligence are constantly and consciously using auto-suggestion to keep off or to cure the smaller ailments of humanity, whether of mind or of body. We find, on the contrary, how disastrous to health is the converse line of thought. The acceptance of gloom intensifies and deepens our depression as we allow ourselves to indulge it. To suggest to ourselves that we have the headache will give it to us in a wonderfully short time. We all know persons who have succeeded in making themselves hopeless invalids, though there is nothing organically the matter with them. We know also how easy it is to make a failure of anything if we suggest to ourselves that we

cannot do it. The battle is lost before it is begun. If nothing succeeds like success, certainly nothing fails like failure.

On the other hand, eminent poets in the past have advocated self-suggestion in various departments of life. Virgil in the Fifth Book of the *Aeneid* gives us a vivid account of a boat race, and points out to us the reason why the boat which won the race did win it : *possunt quia posse videntur*—'they are winning because they have made up their minds that they can.' So it has become almost a proverb that you never know what you can do until you try ; or, putting it another way, we shall never do anything worth doing unless we can persuade ourselves that we are able to do it ; till in fact we believe in ourselves and in our power of achievement.

I recall sometimes one of the darkest moments of my life. I stood as a small child on the stairs of my old home (I can remember the pattern of the carpet to this day) and said to myself in a moment of despair, 'I shall never be able to read.' But then I recollected that other boys and girls, whom I had no reason to consider my intellectual superiors, had attained this difficult and far-off goal. I therefore saw no reason why I should not be able to do so. I can now read as well as any one else, and can understand quite a good deal of what I read !

But here is a difference. The Christian, while admitting all this, while willing to use all the powers he has of healthy self-suggestion, will have something to add, which is more important than all the rest. In the process of healing, for instance, while we admit to the full the usefulness of believing that

we are going to get better, we shall before all else regard our recovery as a matter for prayer. That is to say, while using our own mental powers to the fullest degree, we shall also be in conscious dependence upon a power infinitely greater than our own.

It is, however, in one department of human activity, the greatest and most costing of all, that we want now to consider the value of self-suggestion. Is it permissible deliberately to employ auto-suggestion in the sphere of prayer, or is it a dangerous method to be shunned if we can do so? It is very difficult, indeed impossible, as we all know, for a Christian to discriminate here: to distinguish what is the work of the Holy Spirit, and what part of it may provisionally be said to be our part in the process; what is God's reaching down to us, and what is our poor holding up our hands to Him.

What Hinders Prayer

This brings us necessarily to consider the hindrances which beset us in our prayer. They are many and varied. Some of them we shall be considering in later parts of this book. At this point we may think of one of them, which is very elementary, seeing whether the practice of auto-suggestion may not help us here. Hopelessness is one of the hardest things to bear. The feeling that one has tried so hard and for so long fruitlessly, baffles. Nothing worth having seems to have come. All our efforts to concentrate, to speak effectively, and to listen intently are apparently useless. 'I never can do it,' we say, 'how others manage it I don't know; I want to pray, but the capacity to do it is evidently not in me.'

Here surely self-suggestion may help. We must not say : ' I envy So-and-so his wonderful power of prayer. I am amazed when I read or hear what other people can achieve in their devotional life.' That may be some use ; but the real thing to say is : ' I hope I am not unduly proud ; but I am sure God has given me capacities for prayer which, so far as I can see, are not inferior to those of some other people. Is there any good reason why, with His help, I should not also be able to pray ? ' So we can begin again with confidence, putting away the foolish despair and the disabling self-doubtfulness or our doubts of the efficacy of prayer, and try with better faith.

FORTIFICATION OF MEMORY

And here memory ought to help us. We all remember what has happened to us before now. We took only a very little trouble about our prayers, and wonderful things happened. We started reading a little in some books about prayer written by the experts. It was not very much, for we had little time ; but refreshment came at once. We were strengthened by fresh views of God ; new ideas came to our rescue. Or we faced some discipline (it is the old story over again) ; we got up a quarter of an hour earlier, we fenced off a little time, we arranged our day better, we denied ourselves some light and foolish reading ; and we were stronger directly. In fact, there *was* a difference.

Perhaps we have dropped back into the old carelessness, and we do not really blame ourselves as we ought. We do not say what is true : ' It is my own fault.' No, we blame ' difficulties.' We blame our

work, or our health, or our friends, or our general circumstances. Sometimes we come rather near to blaming God for our loss of hope. It is so unreasonable. We ought to put two and two together and see why things happen. But we do not do it ; we do not say : ' I took that good step once, and that excellent effect followed. If I pull myself together and do it again, there is very great likelihood that the same happiness, or even greater happiness, will come to me now.'

Or it may be that our present rule is not good enough. We have seen higher and holier things, but are still trying to live on the old level. We have got to rise above that and make new rules to fit the new experience.

But now suppose further, we have rallied all our forces and said to ourselves : ' I know I can. I realize the possibilities, and I am sure that if I try I shall find myself daily growing stronger in my prayers. I am sure I can do better than I have been doing lately. Anyway, I will put my trust in the Holy Spirit, rally all the forces I have, and try.' If we do that we shall find wonderful things coming to pass at once, or at least very soon. We have, in fact, made a simple act of Christian self-suggestion.

God's help

But there is more to it than this, for here comes in the generosity of God. Nothing amazes me so much in my own life of prayer as the wonderful way in which the Holy Spirit repays me for doing so little. It is like compound interest. We put in a very little effort ; we humbly offer to God the powers we have

from Him ; we try to strengthen our feeble beliefs in what we could do, God helping us, and the wonders begin at once. The Collect for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity begins to express something of what we have in our minds about this :

> Almighty and everlasting God, Who art always more ready to hear then we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire, or deserve ; Pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy ; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

We press forward a little, and the difficulties crumble before us. The apparently impossible comes to pass. From this point of view the life of prayer is like a holy and wonderful romance. The capacity we never thought we possessed, indeed which we did not possess, suddenly appears. We find ourselves *there* when we have hardly begun. Or more prosaically, *solvitur ambulando* ; if you go on walking you are bound to get somewhere.

So we see that self-suggestion is an old friend with a new name. We have all been taught about ventures of faith. Cardinal Newman has a wonderful sermon somewhere in which he tells us we must always keep our foremost foot on ground we are not yet quite sure of, and go forward. God makes the ground sure, and we call it experience. If I am told that this is just self-suggestion after all, well, I can only say I cannot make you believe that it is not. But try. Do not be afraid. Get experience for yourself and see what it comes to mean to you. Anyway, try. Do not stand shivering on the brink

because you fear you may not be able to swim after all.

Seriously ; the world of God is tingling with power largely unappropriated, but waiting for us to make it our own. I do not very much like the catch-words of the present time. I get tired of challenges, uplifts, reactions, and contacts ; but I find a word constantly used by young people to be very useful. I mean the word ' dynamic.' I take it to mean a living power, capable of being used by those who have the courage and the sense to take hold of it. A power far stronger than oneself which reinforces and intensifies a hundredfold what we are able to do for ourselves.

Our ' dynamic ' as Christians is the power of the Spirit of God. We want to lay hold of that, and we can lay hold of it by believing that we are capable of infinitely more than we are doing now in the sphere of prayer. Let us be sure that we can do anything if we are sensitive and responsive to the divine Spirit, and give Him free course in our lives. We have already thought in this book about ' theophanies '—appearances and manifestations of God in and through visible things. If the Spirit can show Himself in trees and rivers and mountains and seas, in things we call inanimate ; with what mighty power could He show Himself in miracles of intelligence like you and me ? We are meant to be each of us a theophany, a manifestation of the power of God.

CHAPTER IX

'RELIGIOUS' AND 'SECULAR'

THE custom of retirement from the world into quiet places where peace was to be found, and removal from the temptations and chances of life, dates far back in Christian history. It does not, however, belong to the very earliest times. There is no trace in the life of our Lord or of the Apostles of anything more than longer or shorter, but still temporary, withdrawals from the common life. It is true that our Lord retired at times into the wilderness to pray. We have, for instance, the Forty Days and other much shorter periods. We have also hints that S. Paul spent longer times in quiet and thought. But there is nothing here to show us an ideal of permanent retirement from the general life of the world. When our Lord and S. Paul go apart, they do it in order that they may return refreshed and strengthened for active work.

Christian monasticism first appears in Egypt about the year 250. It was almost as much a popular religious movement as Franciscanism in the Middle Ages, or the Salvation Army in our own day. Its appearance in the Egyptian desert rather than elsewhere would seem to have been due to the fact that the persecution under the Emperor Decius was felt with peculiar violence in that country, and particu-

larly in Alexandria, where there was then a large and flourishing Church. This first monasticism was a total withdrawal. There was, at least for the vast majority of men and women who went into the desert, no intention of coming back to engage in mission work in the world. They were called hermits, eremites ; that is, dwellers in the desert. Holiness, they felt, could only be maintained by a complete forsaking of the world of men.

PARTING OF THE WAYS IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

But since those days, indeed very early in the history of monasticism, there has come a forking of the ways, and the religious life to-day in great measure, as it has been for centuries, takes two recognizable forms. There are the pure contemplatives ; those who continue the earliest tradition, though with one significant change. The solitary, the hermit, continued to exist for many centuries, but he or she has almost disappeared from the Church now, for excellent reasons. Even contemplatives now live in communities. It may be that they seldom speak ; but it has been found dangerous for most men and women to live in total solitude. So to-day there are the well-known communities of contemplatives throughout the Catholic world.

On the other side, and I suppose in far greater numbers, are the Religious Orders whose ideal is the active work of the conversion of the world. They exist in order to do mission work, whether in their own country or in lands far away from home ; but they differ from the ordinary missionary, man or woman, in that their first obedience, under God, is

to their community. In some sense they live a common life, whether in the mother house or in branch houses in smaller numbers. They are bound together by a rule of discipline and prayer, which all are bound to observe wherever they may be.

It has always been one of the foundation problems of monasticism to determine how to fuse the two sides of the life together in just proportion. How much time and energy must be given to prayer? How far must activity take the chief place? What is to happen if one member of a community shows a vocation to the other kind of religious life? The history of monasticism both for men and women has constantly shown the difficulties of this problem. It may be seen to-day in the Church of England. Sometimes it is difficult to decide the final direction which a community is to take. It may start off in one direction and then be led in the other. But these are details. They are interesting, but they must not detain us from our main point.

For we may take it that underlying the whole of the Religious Life is a common ideal. It is the simplification of human life; the setting free of soul and body in such a way that, being no longer troubled by the disturbances of the outward world, the religious may wait upon God in the specialized life of discipline and prayer. There is, therefore, a deliberate shutting out of many normal, and for others perfectly right, activities and interests. Even family life is banished. Fatherhood and motherhood, with all the tremendous joys and responsibilities they carry, are excluded, together with many other innocent relations of human life; voluntary

poverty and obedience to the superior take the place of them. By the contemplatives this simplification is carried to its complete point. The life of the world is altogether given up, even in the form of the work of conversion. Conversation is reduced to the smallest possible limits, and great asceticism is practised. Contemplatives can know little, less and less indeed as the years go by, of the life of the outside world, though they may be told enough to make their prayers as intelligent as possible. But the ideal is pure worship, the utterly undisturbed approach to God in adoration and prayer, and the service of man only in intercession.

A QUESTION

We come now to the question which is really the subject of this chapter. It has exercised my own mind for years, and has, I know, exercised the minds of many others. It is concerned with our fundamental conception of the life of prayer. It is this. Is there something in the Religious Life which is essentially higher than the life of prayer lived in the world? Is it in itself more pleasing to God? Does it lead at its best to a holiness which surpasses that of any other mode of living? Or is it possible to live a life of prayer as near to God as any, without this voluntary withdrawal? For instance, can a person who is married, or a priest who is not a Religious, ever hope to attain to the highest service of God possible on earth, or is he permanently and in the nature of things on a lower level?

Let us examine this question, for it is of the greatest importance. And let us begin by recalling

the grand work done in this world for seventeen centuries by the servants of Christ who have lived for Him as monks and nuns. There is the work of pure prayer, the oblation of the whole activity of a human soul to God in this way. There are fasts and vigils, the deliberate shutting of the eyes and of the ears to all except that which is planned to draw the soul to God. This solitude of the spirit has been the ideal of some of the noblest of the saints during the greater part of the life of the Christian Church. It is a monument of love and self-denial.

And then there is the work of conversion. Again, for many centuries the Religious Orders have poured into the world men and women on fire with God. The slums of the great cities have always known them. When in the thirteenth century the friars began their labours they sought in every country in Europe the filthiest, the most squalid parts of the towns. There, undeterred by pestilence or thieves or hunger, they spent themselves in the service of God and man. The history of the other Orders is similar. No country was so far off or so dangerously pagan but the Religious sent their missions there. Whole companies of them have gone forth and never been heard of again. Nations now Christian owe their conversion to the preaching of monks and the tender work of sisters. There is no country which owes more to the Monastic Orders, whether Celtic or Italian, than this England of ours.

And again, we have the learning of the Christian scholars of the Religious Life. Illustrious names rise to our minds, Bernard, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, and a host of others, whose offering to God has

been ceaseless and self-forgetting study. In all of them we get the same marks of holiness : contempt of the world, its seductions, its dangers ; poverty, chastity, and obedience. In them all we read the same great motto : Jesus Only—Jesus in the study, in the slum, in the far-off foreign land ; and other men and women seen in Jesus.

The Religious Life has had its critics and its tragedies. Men and women have often fallen short of the ideal ; yet it is a glorious picture, glowing, romantic, heroic. No wonder the *Lives of the Saints* are full of Religious. No wonder that every famous library is stocked with their writings. No wonder they have earned the rich and generous gratitude of the poor. In every country the Religious Orders have been persecuted and reviled. No effort has been spared by kings and governments to make an end of this kind of life ; but it stands to-day only strengthened by persecution, emerging purified and deepened by the efforts made to suppress it.

Yes, it is a noble picture. But still our question is unanswered : Is there anything essentially more pleasing to God in this life than in the life of prayer in the world ?

The Answer

We must first appeal to Christian experience in all ages ; and here at the start we cannot forget that the greatest of Christians the world has ever known were not Religious. We will not speak of the Mother of Jesus : she stands apart by herself. But S. Peter was a married man. S. Paul was certainly no monk. We have two hundred years of apostles, martyrs,

confessors, living in the world at one of the darkest periods of human history. They preserved unstained the finest flower of the life in Jesus. Many of these were married people, as have been also some of the greatest mystics in all the ages of the Church. They saw and knew the things of God as clearly as any others who ever lived. They worked and died for Jesus Christ. Among them, too, are missionaries, scholars, experts in prayer.

It is true that we have to set against this S. Paul's repeated insistence on the supreme virtue of virginity. He says that there is no harm in marriage, and indeed that some people had better marry ; but he evidently considers that not to be married is the higher state. Yet it is clear now that S. Paul, in taking this line, was convinced that the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ was imminent, and that He might appear almost immediately. It is inevitable that his teaching should be somewhat coloured by this expectation. It is better, he says, *in these circumstances*, to put away all human entanglements and simply to look for the Lord. And if we are told that our Lord commanded a certain young man He loved to go and sell all that he had, we must remember that voluntary poverty is possible for, and has often been undertaken by, men and women apart altogether from the specific monastic life.

Moreover, some of the greatest Religious have themselves said without hesitation that there is nothing essentially superior in the monastic life, and that God expects just as much from those who live in the world as from those in the cloister. S. Ignatius of Loyola was not a man who would minimize the

greatness of the Religious Life; but in the *Spiritual Exercises* he teaches that the very highest perfection of the Christian life is open to lay people no less than to priests and to Religious.

The forgetfulness of this fact, and the asserted or implied claim that there are two levels of holiness, a higher level for the Religious and a lower one for the rest of Christians, has been a spiritual disaster of the first magnitude. It is not that the Religious make proud claims to superior virtue. They are the humblest of all. But unhappily the 'double level' idea has been used by ordinary people as an excuse for sinking to a lower way of life than that which they are called upon by God to attain.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF LIFE IN THE WORLD

Yet it must be admitted that the life of prayer in the world is supremely difficult. I suppose we must not say that it is harder than the service of God in the cloister. Certainly we can say that there are fewer safeguards in the world than in the monastery. It is all very complex, and never more so than to-day, when the common standard of life is perceptibly lower than in some other ages. Christian ideals, moral and spiritual, are openly questioned all around us. Temptation sorely besets those who would serve God in the rush and hurry of life. So it often seems impossible to get the time, and still more to gain the quietness of spirit, which are necessary for prayer. We have no simplification to help us to keep our lives protected and recollected. Most of us have no 'rule' in common with many others who live in close touch with ourselves. We have no superior to

whom we can go in our distress for guidance and comfort. There is little shelter for us from the storm and stress. Perhaps we hardly know even what privacy is. There is no beautiful chapel to which we can thankfully betake ourselves. And we are tempted to think that such a life as ours cannot be meant by God to be passed on the level of the Religious, who, in their quiet homes of prayer, have everything to help them.

Yet such thoughts are treason to God, and spell failure in the spiritual life. For we are called to the very highest of which human beings are capable. We are called to perfection. There are no two levels in the sight of God. And ours is a very high vocation. Here we are, busy, and occupied with an enormous variety of duties : business, pleasure, interests, friendships. And we are to sanctify them all ; we are to use them all for prayer ; we are to pray in and through them : in fact, they are the occasions of a great part of our prayer. It is because we have so little time that we can fence round for quiet, that we are bound to pray through all our many activities.

Yet it is just this possibility which makes our call to prayer in the world so splendid a vocation. The fuller life is, the more interests we have, the wider is the sphere of our prayer. Just because it is so rich and many-coloured, so enthralling and delightful, even so exacting and perplexing, it is all the more worthy to be offered to God. We may not compare the two lives, Religious or secular ; each is pleasing to God, each is capable of perfection, whether it is the life of stillness and silence, the

world shut out and the interests simplified; or whether our lot is cast in the full stream of life. In either case we are the called of God, and neither is better than the other with Him.

So let us remember a great saying of S. Paul. We are to use the world as not abusing it. Or, as Dr. Moffatt translates it, 'let those who live in the world live as if they were not engrossed in it.' So whatever we do, let us do all to the glory of God.

CHAPTER X

THIS WORLD AND THAT

IT is the motive power of all religion that 'here we have no continuing city, but we seek one'; we 'seek for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.' In no religion is this sense of seeking so all-pervading as it is in Christianity. The New Testament is full of it; the Christian religion is not a state, but a way to something beyond. It is a very delightful road, though it may sometimes be arduous. And the master-Christian is he who has gone farthest in exploration, and has come back for a while to tell us where he has been and what he has found, so that he may induce us also to go and see for ourselves what he has found.

> Processit longe flammantia moenia mundi
> atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque,
> unde refert nobis victor quid possit oriri,
> quid nequeat . . .[1]

For us then too religion is a way, a seeking, an exploration. We see the City of God far off, eternal

[1] 'Forth he marched beyond the flaming ramparts of the world, as he traversed the immeasurable universe in thought and imagination; whence victorious he returns bearing his prize, the knowledge what can be, what cannot . . .' (*Lucretius*, book i, lines 73–76).

I have boldly adopted the magnificent words of a mighty non-Christian poet.

in the heavens; indeed, we live as seeing it by flashes for a moment. How are we to reach it? What is the way? Are there many roads to it, or only one? Are some longer or shorter than others? Do all lead in the right direction?

I am not proposing to discuss the varying merits of different theological systems, nor to point out that there is but one truth. I only want to look at some of the ways by which here and now we may gain glimpses of the Holy City. Some of them are not specifically 'religious' at all, in the narrower sense of that overworked word; but all are for some of us means by which we gain liberation of spirit to go forth to seek the City which hath foundations.

Detachment: and the Ladder of Created Things

Historically there are two great main roads by which men and women have sought the Celestial City; they are the way of Detachment, and the Ladder of Created Things. I separate them for the sake of argument, though the finest spirits have known how to use both.

If I do not write much about detachment, it is not because I do not realize its importance in countless saintly lives. That an attitude of detachment from the evil of the world, and even for some of us, sometimes, from things otherwise good and beautiful, forms a prominent part of Christian teaching cannot be doubted. 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me,' says our Lord. We must, as was

said at the end of the last chapter, live in this world as not engrossed by it.

Yet I do think it is sometimes too strongly emphasized. I am sure that some spiritual directors confuse and trouble those whom they are trying to help, by teaching severe detachment indiscriminately to all, as though it were the only way to the throne of God. And I have known persons who were so completely detached that, however happy they may themselves have been, they were quite useless, and even repulsive, to their fellow mortals. Detachment is a noble ideal, but I greatly doubt whether in its extreme forms it is meant for everybody. It has been taken to imply the deliberate exclusion from life, not only of the elements which must always harm the immortal spirit, but also of many of the loveliest and purest things of the earth. The sights and sounds of nature, most of the finest art, even the sweetest and most harmless manifestations of human love, must go. All these hinder the soul in its ascent to the City of God. They entangle it, and make progress difficult or impossible.

This is the way trodden by many of the saints. But it is not the only way ; the history of holiness makes that clear enough. And therefore, while I thank God for that kind of experience, which has brought so many to Him, I want to make a claim for a way of approach which is too little esteemed by those who preach detachment rather generally to us all. Great literature vastly stimulates and tones the prayer of many of us ; so does the beauty of the earth ; so have noble buildings ; so does history ; so does human friendship. It is very well worth

while at this point to consider briefly some of these paths, by which we who are living in the modern world can find our way through the lovely things by which the generosity of God has surrounded us, to Him Who made and gave them to us.

Great Literature

I am not at this moment considering theological reading, strictly so called. Every priest, at any rate, who wants to do his duty by God and his people and himself must be a serious and persevering student of theology ; that is, however busy he may be, there should be a definite rule of study. I do not see how sermons can continue to be profitable to our hearers unless they are constantly nourished on fresh ideas. And I do not see how either the clergy or the laity can expect to go on praying intelligently unless they keep themselves abreast of current knowledge. God forbid that we should disparage the simple prayers of the humble ; but we to whom He has given minds capable of thought are bound to use those gifts in His service. This I take to be axiomatic.

We, however, who dare to call ourselves religious people, are in some danger of narrowing our minds on to certain fixed lines which we dignify by the term 'spiritual,' and of becoming forgetful of that wide realm of beauty and inspiration contained in what we call secular literature. Let me narrate a saving experience of my own.

Some years ago, when I was vicar of a great industrial parish in Birmingham, I was sitting in my chair after lunch, wondering what I had better read next. I stretched out my hand rather idly towards the book-

case, and by chance took down a Virgil, which I had not opened since I was an undergraduate at Oxford. The book opened at the Fourth Eclogue, and I read:

> Ultima Cumaei venit jam carminis aetas ;
> magnus ab integro saeclorum nascitur ordo.
> jam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna ;
> jam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto. [1]

'Nothing very spiritual here,' you say? Wait a bit! I gasped with joy, and read on. Since then I have never gone away for my holiday without taking a Latin or Greek Classic with me. In the course of the years I have read the whole of Virgil and Lucretius, a good part of Ovid, and considerable pieces of the *Odyssey*. I regard the re-discovery of the Classics as one of the great events of my spiritual life. I record this personal experience only in order to testify to the enlarging and liberating value both for the outward and inward life of a study apparently remote from one's ordinary prayer and work.

But it is not only the ancient languages which give this enlargement. Consider, for instance, this from *Paradise Lost* :

> Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks
> In Vallombrosa, where th' Etrurian shades
> High overarch't imbower ; or scattered sedge
> Afloat, when with fierce winds Orion armed
> Hath vext the Red-Sea coast, whose waves o'erthrew
> Busiris and his Memphian chivalrie.

[1] Come are those last days that the Sibyl sang :
The ages' mighty march begins anew.
Now comes the Virgin, Saturn reigns again ;
Now from high heaven descends a wondrous race.

Or this :

> . . . high over the incircling canopy
> Of night's extended shade, from Eastern point
> Of Libra to the fleecy star that bears
> Andromeda far off Atlantic seas.

Or this from *King Lear* :

> . . . Come, let's away to prison ;
> We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage ;
> When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
> And ask of thee forgiveness ; we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court news ; and we'll talk with them too,
> Who loses and who wins ; who 's in, who 's out ;
> And take upon's the mystery of things,
> As if we were God's spies ; and we'll wear out,
> In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones
> That ebb and flow by the moon.

Divine magic ! And yet people say it is not 'spiritual' ! Not spiritual ? The music sets the heart at liberty. All that is mean, sordid, merely worldly, departs. We dwell in another world, where God is, Who made the beauty.

For I maintain that passages of great literature like these—I opened Virgil, Milton, Shakespeare almost at random, and lighted on them—have the property, not merely of pleasing the mind, and elevating it, but of so toning it that it finds itself more naturally also in prayer. Those who will nourish their thought on such high poetry find themselves growingly at home with the things of eternity. All this can be woven, whether consciously or uncon-

sciously matters little, into the adoration of God. For prayer as well as other matters can be great or small, cramped or free. It needs for its full expansion that the whole of the experience of a life, as widely ranging in ideas as can be, should be brought into its direct service. The utmost humility in approaching God is not incompatible with a grand manner of prayer.

Let us turn now to literature more usually recognized as 'religious.' That which deals with technically spiritual ideas is understood by all as directly connected with prayer. We may open our Bible almost at random also, and find ourselves reading passages as magnificent as man ever wrote. Listen to this :

Arise, shine ; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. . . . Lift up thine eyes round about, and see : all they gather themselves together, they come to thee : thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side.

Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows ?

Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far . . . unto the Name of the Lord thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because He hath glorified thee. (*Isa.* lx.)

Or this from the Psalms :

Let my prayer be set forth in Thy sight as the incense ; and let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice.

Or this :

There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of

the Lord shone round about them : and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not : for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. . . . (*S. Luke* ii.)

Or this :

Beloved, let us love one another : for love is of God ; and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. (1 *S. John* iv. 7.)

These again are passages taken almost at random from an unlimited storehouse of spiritual beauty. It is open to everybody ; the Bible, Shakespeare, Milton are as cheap as any books we can buy. Here, for those who desire it, is ' joy in widest commonalty spread.'

THE BEAUTY OF THE EARTH

I am always afraid of getting sentimental, and boring people, and of exposing myself to the contempt of the unimaginative, when I talk about what is called (a horrible word) Nature. And therefore, instead of trying to write what I feel about mountains and rivers, hills and trees and torrents, and wide open plains and gardens, I will quote one whom few will suspect of being sentimental in any contemptible sense. The Dean of S. Paul's, in his great book, *Christian Mysticism* (Bampton Lectures, 1899), says : ' All nature is the language in which God expresses His thoughts ; but the thoughts are far more than the language. Thus it is that the invisible things of God may be already seen and understood from the things that are made.'

And again : ' The hymn which is ever ascending from the earth to the throne of God is to be listened

for that we may join in it. . . . As for the beauty which is everywhere diffused so lavishly, it seems to be a gift of God's pure bounty to bring happiness to the unworldly souls who alone are able to see and enjoy it.' And again, in speaking of the different ways by which man ascends to the City of God, he agrees that the ascetic shut up in his bare cell has arrived at the same blessedness as the holy person who sees God in the visible beauty. 'They have been climbing the same mountain from different sides. The paths are different, but the prospect from the summit is the same.'

The same sense of the beauty of nature runs through much of the Old Testament: 'O Lord, how manifold are Thy works; in wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth is full of Thy riches.' 'Thy righteousness standeth like the strong mountains; Thy judgements are like the great deep.' 'Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth.' Indeed, the love of the earth has deeply penetrated human religion, in increasing measure as the centuries have gone on. In our day nature-worship has come to be a thing in itself for sensitive but shallow minds. That is the danger we have to avoid; for it is as a mode of liberation of the spirit to seek God that the love of the earth is precious. Thus pure souls mount through the beauty of the visible order. The unseen becomes visible to them through the things that are seen.

In the same order of experience is the inspiration which comes to us through great buildings, which God has used the mind of man to create. I am always

in danger, when driving across Magdalen Bridge in Oxford, of slaying some of the push-bikes which swarm on the bridge, because I am praising God for the loveliness of Magdalen Tower. And there are few places where the spirit can find such freedom as in Westminster Abbey late at night, when the visitors have gone, and the great, half-lighted, lofty church is silent except for the roar of the street which comes dimly through. It is the same when one stands on the North Hill above Malvern and looks at the long line of the nave and the mighty tower of Worcester Cathedral.

All these sights are common enough ; we are always seeing them, or things like them. But how few people use them as means for the praise of God. One other comes to my mind as I write ; it is the sky-line of the Government Buildings in Whitehall as seen from the bridge over the little lake in S. James's Park. I do not believe that even the sky-line of Padua itself is any finer. Beautiful ? Yes ; but more. It is one of the gifts of God's pure bounty, made to give happiness to those who have eyes to see Him in the common sights of every day. These also have power to liberate the spirit to seek Him.

The Influence of Other Persons

So far in this chapter we have considered the influence on our seeking for the kingdom of God of literature, nature, architecture, choosing them for brief treatment because they are typical of a great mass of human experience which, being largely apart from what most people disastrously segregate as

religion, have yet power to liberate the spirit. We now come to the crucial point. What is, or should be, the influence on our life towards God of the men and women by whom our life is surrounded ?

I suppose if we were suddenly asked what element in life we find most perplexing, we should probably answer that it was our relation with other human beings ; and particularly, if we are trying to pray, the impact of these men and women and children on our relation with God. We have decided that the highest human activity is the seeking of union with God ; yet we find that our love or dislike for other people is continually affecting our power to pray. It is well, therefore, that we should in outline consider other persons, first as hindrances, and then as helps, to our attitude towards the eternal world. Here they are, created by God, and adjusted (so we may think of them for a moment, without self-centredness) to our present life. They have been given to us by Him in order that we with them and they with us may work out our salvation. That is our vocation ; yet we find that unless we take very great care, we are prone to misuse these creatures of God ; and this misuse lies at the heart of sin. It would be difficult to imagine a more horrible crime than the destruction of the innocence of one of these friends whom God has given to us.

OTHER PERSONS AS HINDRANCES

So our relation with other men and women may lead to evil ; and perhaps chiefly in two ways—through hatred and through love.

We all know that to hate one person only must

ruin our power to pray, though too many of us are trying desperately to forget so painful a fact. And what is almost as bad is the cynical tone of mind towards others into which we may fall without realizing it. Was it not poor old Carlyle who said that there were forty million persons in Great Britain, mostly fools? It sounds so smart, and we laugh, and say, 'What a clever person he is!' But how wretched, really. It is not a happy man, or a good man, who talks like that. Nor is it a man who really understands human nature.

So hatred and contempt hurt. But love can hurt horribly, too. Inordinate affection, as S. Paul calls it, may or may not lead to what would ordinarily be called sin. But short of that, it is capable of leading us to infinite folly, indiscipline, misery, loss of God. We no longer have the feeling for eternal thoughts, for we are drenched in the things of earth and the flesh. We wretchedly weaken ourselves and the person we love. But enough! Experience teaches what pain lies here.

Apart from actual evil, we may easily allow other persons to distract us from God. They may engross us entirely. We have only, being human, a certain more or less fixed amount of energy and time to give; and if it is all being used up in hatred or love, or even in the service, of others, there is little or none left for the supreme quest. This must not be; and those of us who know anything about prayer have to map out our time and discipline our energies, with this consideration in mind. We shall not, in fact, do much which is worth doing for other men and women if we are neglecting God for their sakes.

So we must learn habitually to ask ourselves whether the time, trouble, force, we are expending on this or that person or group of persons is distracting us from prayer ? This is not selfishness. When we consider the difficulty and cost of the pure service of God, it appears as the highest form of unselfishness, fitting us for the most effective service of those we love.

OTHER PERSONS AS HELPS

Thus we see that love of men and women may separate us from God. But it can also unite us very closely to Him. The question we have to ask ourselves is a simple but searching one. Is the use I am making of this person ; is what I am giving to this person, in accord with the best I know of God's will for him and me ? Can I sincerely say Yes to that question ? Sometimes we cannot. Either the whole relation, or some parts or some manifestations of it, are hurting our conscience, and very likely our friend's conscience as well. Then the duty is clear ; the whole friendship must be at once so modified as to bring it within the will of God.

But there is nothing more delightful (except the pure love of God) than to be able to say with complete sincerity, ' Yes, I can thank God for all that this dear person is to me, and for all that I am to him. I am sure that together we are doing God's will for us both.' So delightful ; but what wisdom and sincerity are needed !

And beyond this, we must learn to think of and see all human beings kindly and as the children of God. That sounds like a very elementary platitude,

I know, and ' pious ' as well. But let us set ourselves a simple test for the sake of illustration. When you get into a third-class railway carriage, how do you regard the people whom you find there ? Do you scowl casually round, saying to yourself, ' That old man drinks, obviously' ; ' What a cross-faced woman ' ; ' What an odious child.' Or do you look at them with friendship ? not speaking, probably, but with goodwill and perhaps a moment's prayer before settling down to your newspaper or novel ? Call it ' sloppy ' if you like ; but if you will examine your feelings on such an occasion as that, you will find out a good deal about your ultimate character, and your whole attitude towards God and man.

For we need to see all these people as for us part of that ladder of created things by which we may mount into eternity ; so we learn to treat each person as a suggestion, a cause of prayer or thankfulness. We may not actually form the prayer with our lips, scarcely sometimes even with our minds ; but there is the hidden spirit of helpfulness which makes us really effective when we have to speak or intercede. Those who so look at the human life which surrounds them are likely to find the way themselves and to become leaders of other men and women to the City of God.

CHAPTER XI

'AN HEARTY DESIRE TO PRAY'

THE venerable prayer which is used as the Collect for the Third Sunday after Trinity has been on the lips of members of the Church for at least eleven hundred years, and probably for two hundred years longer than that. It is contained in a service book sent about A.D. 790 by Pope Adrian I to the Emperor Charles the Great, but it is very likely that it dates back to the time of S. Gregory at the end of the sixth century. It brings before us a thought which seems to grow out of the other considerations on which we have dwelt, and which must have been in the minds of many of the millions of Christians who have used it through the centuries. It runs thus :

O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to hear us ; and grant that we, to whom Thou hast given an hearty desire to pray, may by Thy mighty aid be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities ; through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen.

The thought which comes out of it is expressed in the one hundred and thirty-ninth psalm : ' Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me. I cannot attain unto it.' And it is not only here that this daunting idea is suggested to us in ancient prayer ; the whole history of Christian devotion is

full of it ; and it is interesting to note that this and many other collects of incomparable grace and depth of divine meaning come to us from what the historians are accustomed to call the 'Dark Ages.' Whatever may be the truth about the darkness of those times, it would be hard to think of anything brighter than these noble and stately prayers.

So we are taught to speak of ourselves to God as persons to whom He has given 'an hearty desire to pray.' So the Church bids us to address Him. But is it true ? It would seem to us generally almost absurd to use such words : far too bold and presumptuous, knowing what we are. I may be writing for some happy people of whom the words are true. There are many men and women who really have a hearty desire to pray. They love to come to their prayers, and find in them their greatest joy. But I am sure that there are many of whom it would not be at all true to say that they often have this kind of desire. They even find quite elementary prayers almost impossibly difficult at times. It requires a struggle, morning after morning, to get up in time to pray ; they have to face this sternly, and to exercise a good deal of discipline if the evening prayers are to be said at all well. There are some kinds and times of prayer to which they are quite sure they ought to be faithful, but which are almost always indescribably difficult and unattractive. They go to church from duty, but find it rather dull. How, then, are they to dare to tell God that they have a hearty desire to pray ? This is a very serious problem which daunts many good people unnecessarily. Let us think of some ways in which we can approach it.

THE WORDS REPRESENT AN IDEAL

That is to say, they express what we all wish for, but are not as yet able to attain. For I take it that every Christian person really and truly longs to feel the desire of which the collect speaks. And we believe, further, that by the grace of God and by an intelligent reliance on Him, with faithful perseverance, we could, at least in time, gain something of an hearty desire to pray. We want to have it. We long to be able to look forward eagerly to our times of prayer, whether it be the worship of the Church—our offering of the Holy Sacrifice—or of our times of prayer in quiet and withdrawal. We really do hate our slackness and feebleness in prayer ; we take upon our lips the classic words of the saints in all the ages, and long that they might be real to us. 'O God, Thou art my God ; early will I seek Thee. My soul thirsteth for Thee . . . in a barren and dry land.' 'Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God.' 'Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest in the heavens.'

But this means not merely increasing efficiency in a technical activity, which we call prayer. It means an alteration in the orientation of our life. We cannot expect to have an hearty desire to pray if our wishes are usually set upon second and third-rate matters ; on foolish, frivolous, shallow things. Many people think that they ought to be able at will and at any given moment to switch off their minds from foolish, frivolous, purely worldly affairs to the things of God. It cannot be done. We ought, indeed, to

be able to find matter for prayer in all things; in love, conversation, sport, and all else that is healthy and good. But prayer is an attitude of the whole will and mind and heart, set towards the eternal world. That is our ideal; that is what we long for. But how are we to gain it? Well, in innumerable ways: but let us think of one of them, which goes deep into the matter.

A RIGHT INTENTION

I want to put it in the form of a question. What constitutes failure or success in prayer? What have you in your mind when you say to yourself, as you rise despairingly from your knees: 'There, I've failed again'? Such a complaint is often untrue. Remember that there is only one real failure in prayer: it is despair; giving up trying; getting so depressed about the difficulties that we tell ourselves it is impossible to succeed. This, and this alone, is failure. It is not failure when prayer looks utterly unattractive. It is not failure to feel next to nothing. It is not failure when we try so hard, and seem to get no meaning into it, nor joy out of it. We may, indeed, be going the wrong way to work from sheer ignorance: but that is not failure either if we are trying to find out the right way. No; the only failure is the slackness which comes from loss of faith and hope.

And what do you mean by success in prayer?—if, indeed, we may dare to use such a word in this connection. It does not mean being filled with what mystical writers called 'sensible devotion.' We are thankful for that when it comes, but we are

as a rule only very slightly responsible at the time for the state of our feelings. They ebb and flow exteriorly, and depend much upon the past. We must depend more on the Spirit of God. For the spiritual life has two sides. There is that spoken of by the prophet Zechariah, when he says : 'Break up your fallow ground.' Do all in your power to make it possible for God to bless you. But the crowning of the work is His. We can do our little bit to get ready for Him. But He comes as and when He thinks best.

And that brings us to the centre and heart of our subject. What matters chiefly in all life, and particularly in prayer, is not achievement, but intention :

> What I aspired to be
> And was not, comforts me.

What I hope and long for, what I beseech God to give me ; what I am willing to suffer and sacrifice for ; that for which I deny myself what is inconsistent with it : this, we may reverently believe, is what God wants of us.

But now turn to the other side—to the side of God's gift. I often wonder that certain fine words of S. Paul on this subject in the Epistle to the Romans are not more constantly used for meditation of the difficulties of prayer. He says : 'The Spirit helpeth our infirmities ; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought : but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.' We are so apt to worry ourselves by putting forth the last ounce of our energy. We speak and think of effort, and tense concentration.

And we forget this promise of the Spirit. When we have done our calm best, we have to remember that we are just making it possible for Him to begin. He can do in us, and for us, what we could never do for ourselves. We work so hard that we are too tired to think about Him. But our prayer is His work far more than it is ours.

So we reach these two simple points : first, that, so far as we are concerned, perseverance in a right intention constitutes success in prayer. It is not feeling, however deep it may sometimes be, which really counts, but the faithful and quiet going-on. It may sometimes call for hard work, and we may even fear formalism. But we can avoid that danger and find encouragement to persevere when we remember the mighty powers which can work in us if we will but surrender ourselves and allow Him to help our infirmities.

The Effect of Perseverance in a Right Intention

One result of the attitude of which I have spoken is certain. Matthew Arnold, in well-known words, says :

> Such a price the gods exact for song :
> To become what we sing.

He is not thinking here at all about prayer, but about poetry ; yet we can very properly apply what he says to our subject. He means that if we give ourselves wholly, or the best part of us, to any one thing, it comes to be not simply one aspect of our life, but our very self. For instance, in poetry,

which he has in mind in the passage I have quoted, this is true. He would say that any man who devotes himself to trying to express, as well as he can, noble ideas and high thoughts, must certainly in time become himself noble and lofty in mind. So abundantly is it in prayer. The reward God gives to patient and persevering prayer is that we become what we pray. We may only realize this very partially, because, on the one hand, as God lightens our way more clearly, we naturally see defects and failures in ourselves which in the past years were hidden from us ; while, on the other hand, in the same clearer light we see more certainly what we ought to be becoming, and how far we are from attainment. Yet both these facts help us to become more nearly what we pray ; we must learn to forget the things that are behind and to press forward to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

It may perhaps seem that this is all very distant. Let me, then, suggest a picture to you. When you are looking forward to your holiday, you spend a good deal of time in anticipatory study of the guide book. You read, perhaps, something like this : 'The sea here runs up by a long inlet into the land. At the head of the bay is the village of ——, with its church tower standing high above the houses. Behind are lofty hills, clothed with pine woods . . . ,' and so on. Well, you read the guide and you get some kind of general idea of the place to which you are going. It sounds attractive, and you hope to spend a pleasant time there. And then you go to the place and see it. What the guide book said is perfectly true : there is the sea, the grey church

tower, the forest-clad hills. But how different! How completely the book failed to give more than the barest hint of the glorious beauty of the reality!

So it is with the life of prayer. We read books about it, and they are good; we seek out the ways and the rules; we hear what other people have to tell us. It sounds wonderfully attractive. And then we go there. We pray with patient perseverance, putting our best into it, and trusting to the Spirit of God to do infinitely more than we can: until at last, perhaps suddenly, as when a traveller finds himself in a moment face to face with some glorious and unexpected view, perhaps gradually, we find ourselves in the land of God, which seemed so far off. All we had heard, and been told, and read, is true: but who could have dreamed what the reality was going to be?

'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them to us by His Spirit.'

CHAPTER XII

PRAYER AND THE BODY

EVERYBODY realizes that we are learning new and interesting facts about the connection of body and mind. We know more than we did about the subtle inter-relation between them and about the influence each has on the other. I do not profess to have worked deeply at that which is a life study in itself; but every thinking person is reached to some extent by these newly developed ideas. The whole growth of psycho-therapy is evidence of this. Many people to-day are going to doctors of the mind, and those members of the Church whose duty it is to help others in the spiritual life must try to know as much as they reasonably can of this subject.

Not long ago *The Times*, in an article on the Prayer Book Collects, said: 'They give permanent expression to the awe and confidence of men who know that in prayer they exercise the highest office of manhood.' To persons who regard prayer in this way, the problem of mind and body must be of special importance. We cannot help suspecting at least the effect of body on mind; and especially the effect which the state of our body, our good or bad health, our youth or our age, have on our prayers. Few people in my experience realize this fact as they should, and therefore they find themselves in many

difficulties they cannot understand, but which would at least be better understood if they saw the part their body is playing in it all. It is, therefore, worth while to think briefly first of the body as a hindrance to prayer, and then as a help.

What effect has bodily temptation on prayer? And how can a healthy body be made the useful servant of the spiritual life?

THE BODY AS A HINDRANCE

It has long been a tradition in the Church that some modes of weakening the body may be sources of strength to the soul. Fasting, we are told, clears the spiritual perception, and makes it possible for God to speak to us and to be heard, as He cannot speak, or at least as we cannot hear, when the body is better nourished.

I do not think we can deny that there is a good deal in this. The evidence for the value of fasting is too continuous and cogent to be denied. But we must also realize—and here too we have abundance of evidence—that this experience is not true of all of us, or always of any of us. In many cases, weakness or weariness of the body is not a help, but a hindrance. Our minds cannot work calmly if the body is in an abnormal condition.

The more costing kinds of prayer, especially, which need much co-operation on our part with the grace of God, depend to a high extent on the healthy working of the brain. That is why it is so important in times of illness not to force ourselves in prayer to a point at which it becomes impossible. Often we have to make fresh plans for the time. Our method

must be changed ; and probably it is well, just because we are not then our normal selves, that we should especially seek advice of those whom we trust about our prayers in sickness.

But there is a more difficult problem than ordinary illness of the body, for which we have to go to bed and keep quiet. There are those terrible pains of the mind from which most of us suffer to a greater or lesser extent from time to time. I am not thinking of insanity, or even temporary insanity, but of those long times of depression, when we can get about as usual and somehow do our ordinary tasks. But oh, how hard it is ! Perhaps we see a train passing over a railway bridge, or catch sight of a motor car with a big portmanteau strapped on behind, and think to ourselves, ' Lucky people ! If only I could get away from here, from my work and everything, and just be quiet for a bit.' And other people do not understand. We try to explain what is the matter with us, and they say : ' Well, but you eat and drink all right, and you do your work. There is nothing the matter with you. Cheer up, it's all imaginary ! '

Well, is it imaginary ? No, we are ill. Not merely ill in imagination ; there is something physical about it. The body and brain are not functioning as they ought ; and it is now that prayer above all becomes so frightfully difficult. It is not merely uninteresting and dull, it is positively painful. It is an exercise from which we shrink indescribably. What shall we do ? First, it is always good to go and talk it out with some one whom we love and trust ; even if he does not quite understand, it helps just to tell what we are suffering. And if he does

understand, there is no need to say what calm and strength come from sharing our griefs with only one human being.

And it is quite a good thing, too, to make oneself go to bed early for a bit. So many of these troubles of the mind are the result of quite unnecessary folly on our own part. If we would exercise common sense, we should see that nobody is really responsible for our troubles but ourselves.

But further than that : we must keep mentally quiet. Those storms of anger or despair which we allow to occur with little or no restraint are dangerous, especially if others are involved—' Oh, for goodness' sake go away, I cannot bear it '—and all that sort of thing, is weak. It may be said that it is natural and almost inevitable, but it is perilous. Let us be still, and keep a quiet body and tongue. Our self-control will reflect back on the spirit. Our present disturbed self is not the real self. We can remember that things were different and better once. If we do not get excited, they will be different and better again. But above all, we must remember what we have learned from others, and from our own experience about the dark night of the soul ; and how those who remain quiet and still, trusting in God, come out, not where they went in, but higher on the road towards the City of God.

THE BODY AS A HELP

I have already written of the value of fasting. The very moderate present rule of the Church may be made a most valuable self-denial and can hurt very few people even if kept in full strictness, as it

seldom is ; but the ideal which underlies it is not fasting for fasting's sake, but a healthy mind in a healthy body. This must be qualified, as all readers of mystical literature know, by certain observed facts. Many of the great contemplatives have suffered from physical and nervous infirmities. There seems good reason for supposing that in the true mystics physical disorder has often been a result of their experiences ; caused by the intense strain of living on two planes at the same time. But bodily or nervous disorders are not conditions necessary to mystical experience. No doubt God can use bodily weakness as a means of spiritual strength ; but the experiences of the mentally and physically sound are to be trusted. There need be nothing abnormal about true mysticism. It is simply the human spirit performing its most necessary function of seeking and finding in God the goal of all its healthiest longings.

I believe, therefore, that it is our duty as people desiring to pray, to ask God, if it be His will, for healthy bodies and sane minds, in order that we may serve Him with soul and body at their best. This is not to say, as some do say, that pain is altogether evil. The mystery of God's use of bodily suffering is a very deep one. I suppose we cannot say that pain is the creation of God, for it appears to be in the last resort a result of sin, and sin was never God's will. But there can be no doubt at all that God uses pain, and that some of the most beautiful and heroic characters in the history of prayer have—like the Captain of their salvation—been made perfect through suffering.

Unfortunately it is so easy to say lightly, when we are quite well, to some friend who is suffering : 'Well, my dear, you know pain is meant to draw us nearer to God and to conform us to His will.' Shallow talk of that sort does not help much, however true it may be. Those who have really suffered, either in what can be clearly called the body, or in that less easily understood side of us which we call mental, know that there is a complex of suffering and joy, of failure to understand and yet assurance of knowledge, which can only be the individual experience of each sufferer. Pain, whether of mind or body, can be made a new means of conformity with God's will.

BODILY TEMPTATION

We now pass to deal too briefly with a subject which underlies a great part of human life. Temptations of the body are of different kinds, and they form a problem as difficult and painful for most people as any other kind of suffering. Indeed, for many people temptation is worse than any suffering.

Let us be sure of one thing. It may often be difficult to distinguish whether we have or have not entertained temptation ; only the Holy Spirit can help us here. But we shall get miserably weakened if we do not remember that the assault of temptation, even though it be a recognized result of sins past and forgiven, is not in itself a fresh sin.

On the other hand, it has been the unbroken teaching of the Christian Church that bodily temptation is never to be sought. There are some kinds

of temptation which we are almost to look for, such as those against charity. It is often our duty, for instance, deliberately to meet and be kind to persons who naturally are distasteful to us ; but danger of bodily temptation is to be shunned by every means in our power. All occasions that may lead to it are to be avoided, for reasons well enough known to those who at any time have suffered from trouble of this kind. The spirit of bravado here is crass folly, if not worse.

Temptation, as we know, has widely different effects on different people. Many quite respectable persons to-day will tell you that they or some friend of theirs, or some general class—such as young men —are quite incapable of resistance. They must, they maintain, have bodily gratification, and therefore they follow their impulses with little or no restraint. I have sometimes heard people very nearly say that if you are in love with your neighbour's wife, it is God's will you should steal her from her husband. People will go to almost any lengths now in justifying the gratification of their desires. We are often told that love is so beautiful a thing, that it must be entirely wrong to repress it. On such an argument as this every kind of lust is justified.

Other people who are tempted resist, but get hard about it. They blame God, or their ancestors, or their training. They give up prayer, and cease to have anything to do with the spiritual life. Others, again, find through temptation the strengthening of their character. They emerge refined and beautified from the ordeal they pass through. For some, temptation of this kind is an unceasing trial ;

but they get the upper hand, and are splendid Christians.

Here again, however, the greatest use of this kind of suffering is not merely the production of heroic character. It is not only that men and women by the power they have just gained are a strength to the world they live in, and to the people among whom they dwell. The higher purpose of temptation is that it drives people to prayer. It is sometimes said shallowly that we ought not to need to be thus compelled to pray. The people who talk like that are either those superior ones who are little tempted, or else those who have given up the struggle in despair. The simple Christian will be thankful for any discipline, however hard, which forces him to God.

Finally, let us remember that body and mind are both gifts of God. It is foolish to despise either, or to extol either at the expense of the other. They go together, and in this life—the only one of which we have experience—they are inseparable, and seem clearly to be so as science teaches us more of their true nature. Both are to be used in their marvellous inter-action as means of serving God. Both have their honourable part in the life of prayer. We want to seek a harmony of body and mind, in which, both working effectively together, God may be served and loved. ' Therefore glorify God with your body and with your spirit, which are God's.'

CHAPTER XIII

PRAYER AND SIN

WE have been thinking of certain aspects of modern life and prayer, and of our way of life as it affects our prayer ; and in the last chapter especially of the body as a help or as a hindrance ; with a kind of appendix on bodily temptation and its danger and use in prayer. We come now to the really serious point. What is the effect of actual sin on prayer ? It is, of course, quite easy to say that continuance in sin must destroy the desire for prayer and power in it. That is no doubt true, but it is a summary statement which needs to be drawn out rather more in detail.

THE PLACE OF SIN IN OUR LIFE

There are few people, I suppose, who have not in the past, for a longer or a shorter time, given way deliberately to some serious sin, knowing well (at least for part of the time) that the thing was evil. Many of the readers of this book will be able to say that at least the *deliberateness* has gone now. We have realized the evil we did ; and have done, and are doing, the best we can by the grace of God to gain victory over the sin. As a general rule we are trying to hate that sin, or those sins, which once beset us, and to which we are probably still some-

times tempted. We are trying to see this thing as God sees it, and 'to hate what we deplore.'

And usually we succeed : for long times together all goes well. If there is temptation it is overcome as a rule. But there may have been other occasions when the weight seemed to be really greater than our strength would bear, and we have fallen back again into the old sin which we hoped was finally overcome. Or perhaps our hopes had hardly reached that point. We knew our weakness. We felt that the past had harmed us, and that even the effect of a conversion to God was not powerful enough to help us to resist fierce assaults ; and so there has been more than once perhaps a return to what we felt to be grievous sin. That is one menace to our prayer.

But it is not the only danger. There are other ways in which actual sin may be spoiling the spiritual life. Do we at all suspect that we may be half unconsciously falling into a sin we do not wholly recognize, but about which we are not quite easy ? It may be that some one has suggested to us that we are uncharitable, harsh, bitter in our speech, or perhaps are allowing some more subtle sin even than these ; and we are fighting against conviction. We want to believe that what we have been told is untrue. We may really be uncertain ; but all the time the half realized evil is hindering our prayer.

I am very anxious at this point to avoid suggesting scruples to any one. We must be sane and reasonable, and not try to think such things out simply by our own unaided powers. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to grant us the grace of a careful self-examina-

tion, as honest as we can make it. It is also a good thing sometimes to be willing to get another human opinion ; to ask some sensible and friendly person who knows us and our circumstances what he thinks on this point. The answer may be very humiliating. We may find that the fault we have dimly suspected has been only too obvious to everybody else ; or it may be that we receive a welcome and trustworthy assurance that all is well.

But there is a third aspect of this subject. It is often said by moralists that no one can keep the different impulses of his life in water-tight compartments. We are assured that one cannot be a successful hypocrite ; that you cannot let sin have a recognized place in any one part of life and keep the rest of the character at least outwardly virtuous. Well, it seems to me that one can be an astonishingly successful hypocrite, at any rate for quite a long time. The water-tight compartments can be kept water-tight much longer than theory allows. When you light upon the inner secrets of people's lives, you do find often that they seem to be composite personalities. Probably it is true, whatever we may think about such possibilities, that they are only maintained for a time, at any rate inwardly, whatever outward success may be attained in blinding even penetrating persons. But the inevitable result is growing insensitiveness to the voice of God ; the taint may not seem to be spreading, but it does spread. The apparently water-tight compartments are leaking, until gradually the poison taints and paralyses the higher spiritual parts of the life. Considerable efficiency may remain in the less sensitive

side of our activity ; in business capacity, in a certain cynical power of dealing with men and women, and in other departments : but the spiritual insight is blinded.

SIN AND PRAYER

So let us approach more nearly to our actual subject, the effect of sin on the life of prayer. We try to be sensible people who understand that reason as well as feeling has its place in the spiritual life ; and we know that we cannot continue in recognized and serious sin while still remaining seekers after the life of union with God. But we are sometimes tempted, even though we know so much, to give up —not sin but prayer. We properly feel that the two are irreconcilable, but we wonder if we can forsake the sin.

Many years ago a young man came to see me who was in the bonds of a sinful habit. He talked a great deal and many times about his symptoms and his suffering and his hopes. But at last I said to him : ' Now come, we have talked enough ; do you really intend to take every possible means of getting this thing right ? ' ' I cannot imagine my life without it,' was his frankly desperate answer. I have never seen him since ; but if ever a man was on the way to perdition, that man was at that moment.

We do not put it so bluntly to ourselves as that. We just gradually lose interest. Prayer becomes difficult and dark, and at last we do not only cease to understand what we once understood : we utterly cease to remember that some things were ever in our experience at all.

For sin takes the heart out of prayer. It is the sense of inconsistency which is fatal. We may try to persuade ourselves that we are doing something about it, but secretly we know that God is not mocked. We cannot serve Him and sin. That brings us inevitably to another side of the problem. Many people pray, and pray earnestly at their better times, for deliverance from sin, especially from that one which they feel to be most fatal to them ; but they do little or nothing on their own part to bring about the deliverance. They allow the occasions of temptation. They willingly and carelessly go into dangers which they know may easily be fatal. They have, in fact, no real wish to win their battle.

This, to put it mildly, is unreasonable. It brings us back again to our point about water-tight compartments. Our aim must be consistent. Many people fail because they are so unsteadfast. They have no fixed or permanent ideal. They shift and turn about ; they follow several different ideals in one week, perhaps in one day. One of the first necessities in the consideration of the bearing of sin on prayer is clear thought about it, so that consistent action may follow. If we really want to pray, then that must be the primary aim of our life ; and when it becomes obvious, as it must to any reasonable person, that this or that is evil, then the choice is plain.

A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, and sin is very powerful leaven. It upheaves and eats into the whole person. It weakens the will and makes the character deteriorate. It cannot be reconciled

with prayer. That is why we need both courage and consistency. Courage to face the thing right out and to see it as it really is, and consistency to act fearlessly and all the time on the knowledge we have gained.

And here let us take up again one point which we left open at an earlier point in this chapter. The sin which destroys prayer is that deliberate sin in which we mean to continue. The real test to which we must bring our sins is—Do I regard this evil as inevitable? Do I look forward to it as something which must and will occur again in the future? If I do, that is the attitude of mind which is fatal. We shall be dealing in the next chapter with penitence and renewal. It only need be said at this moment that the sin which is the result of sudden, overwhelming temptation; the sin which, in our normal times, we hate and deplore; the sin which is repented immediately with full purpose of amendment, does not destroy our power of prayer.

LOSS OF THE VISION

But let us remember once more that what is involved here is prayer at its highest. We are not thinking merely of petition, or of any special detailed forms of prayer, but of the whole movement of our personality towards union with God. In an age which is in part morally bankrupt, as I fear ours is, at a time when we are told by men and women of learning and influence that some of us cannot resist certain sins, we must be stronger Christians than we were. I am not thinking merely of morals. It is not just keeping straight, or not hurting other

people ; it is the fundamental point of the relation between God and man. There are many elements in life, in themselves not necessarily evil, which may for a moment, or a longer time, dim our vision and make felt union with God difficult. Pain of body or mind often has this effect upon us, just because of our composite humanity. The stress of anxiety or the shock of bereavement may numb for a time the sensitiveness of our apprehension of the love of God, and the presence of Eternity. All kinds of human weakness may trouble us, but not permanently ; for those who are faithful they may come, but they go again.

Spiritual dryness, of which we have also thought, may be infinitely painful, and the sense of loneliness almost more than we can bear, but all this for true men and women is God's discipline. It is sometimes almost unendurable. It may last for a long time, but it is never fatal to the heavenly vision. We may well regard it as part of the punishment we have to bear in reparation for sins past and forgiven : but it is not sin now, and therefore unless we deliberately allow it to do so, it cannot ruin our prayers. Let us remember all that.

But let us also remember that the one fatal enemy still is sin. And if we are conscious that it is this which is really the matter, there are two things to be done. The first is to make a more careful, though not necessarily a very lengthy, self-examination sanely and reasonably and in full reliance on the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit ; and, secondly, to be utterly consistent about the matter. The evil must go ; not merely because it means

spiritual sickness, a weakening will, and an enfeebled character, but because the forsaking of it opens up the growing vision of God to the eyes of the penitent. 'The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

CHAPTER XIV

PRAYER, PENITENCE, AND FORGIVENESS

THE two foregoing chapters of this book have dealt with prayer and temptation, and prayer and sin. We now turn to consider the relation of repentance, forgiveness, and prayer. If the chief sorrow of sin, as we saw, is growing insensitiveness to the voice and vision of God, so the chief joy of repentance is that it enables us to regain and intensify the sensitiveness which we had been in such grave danger of losing.

MOTIVES FOR REPENTANCE

There is probably no complaint which an experienced priest hears more often from the most faithful of his people than that which is conveyed in the phrase, 'I have so little penitence.' 'I am so hard. Other people must be so much better than I am about this. I can feel nothing of this which you speak of as contrition.' Sometimes these people will hardly dare to ask for absolution. They think they are unworthy of God's forgiveness because they are conscious of so little of what they so long to be able to feel. It is not those who are least penitent who so complain, but those who are most troubled about

the imperfections and weaknesses which keep them from God.

There are commonly said to be three ascending stages in penitence. There is first the sorrow for sin which is primarily self-regarding. At this stage we feel very sorry that we have sinned, but it is because of the harm and pain which sin is bringing to ourselves. A man may feel that he is weakening his mind and body, destroying his power of thought and decision, and in a hundred ways spoiling his life. He would give anything to be free from the sin, simply because of the terrible disabilities under which he suffers in consequence of it. It is commonly said that this kind of remorse is quite useless. I am not so sure about that. It is far from being the highest motive for sorrow, but, as we shall see presently, it may well be used as one of the elements in a deeper and more sincere spiritual experience.

The second, and higher, stage is reached when we are sorry for sin because it is hurting some one who is dear to us. It may be the boy's grief when he finds his mother is unhappy at the disgrace he has brought upon himself. It may be the sorrow of the drunkard who has got beyond mere self-regarding remorse. He has long realized the disadvantages to himself ; but now he sees his wife's pale face, his children's ragged clothes and worn-out boots, and understands for the first time that it is because he is spending the money on self-indulgence, which ought to be buying clothes and food for those he loves. Or it may be the even profounder sorrow of those who feel that others are involved in their fault ; and that by the sin they have committed they

have made it more difficult for persons whom they love, and who perhaps know nothing about their falls, to live faithfully.

And then, higher still, there is the sense of penitence which comes from love of God. This is so great a thing that we must consider it a little more in detail. It is necessary to remember that even here people find God and penitence in different ways, according to their different temperaments. Some of them compare the generosity of God the Father, His love and care of them, with their miserable response. They meditate on the greatness of life and on their high vocation, and realize that at a thousand points they have been utterly ungrateful. Others, again, are moved to the depths of their heart by the thought or representation of the Passion of our Lord. A crucifix held before their eyes will touch their hearts and move them to tears when any other consideration leaves them cold. With others, again, the mere thought of the personality and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the sense of the difference between Him and them, will bring about a longing for better things.

We must realize these differences. So many of us, priests and laity, are tempted to think that because our friends do not feel as we do, they are somehow not experiencing what they ought. Or, conversely, we think that if we do not appear to feel as they do, we are somehow shallow and ineffective in our penitence. Narrowness here is a fatal fault in any who would desire to help others. God moves our hearts in mysteriously different ways. But underlying all true repentance is the double sense of love

and loss, of love for Him Whom we desire to find, and whom we have lost through deliberate sin. We cannot see or hear Him : we are out of touch, restless, dissatisfied, unhappy ; and, therefore, because we have read or heard what others have felt, and because we ourselves have memories of what God once was to us, there comes the sense of loss. This loss, and the desire that flows from it, are the motive power of the penitence which brings us back to the vision of God.

The Absence of the Motive

But suppose we still feel that we are at the point at which we began this chapter. Some who have read so far may be thinking, ' I simply have not got that. It sounds the right thing to say, but it means nothing to me. I can scarcely even imagine the sense of penitence which God has given to some people.' Let us then learn to call up other means to help. And first, we are bound to pray for penitence. Whatever may be the actual facts about our feelings, we can at least offer to God our longing for real sorrow. We can tell Him that we desire to have it, and that we are willing to do all that lies in our power to gain it. The fifty-first psalm expresses all that in classical terms.

And secondly, we can get back to the lower and self-regarding motives. It is perfectly right that we should be sorry for having spoiled ourselves. ' I know I am not what I want to be, and I want to be better,' is a perfectly good motive, so long as we regard it as imperfect in itself, and as a help towards something higher. And thirdly, we can use the

mind. We are all constantly reading books written by persons far more deeply spiritual than ourselves, containing expressions of penitence which on our lips would be sheer and senseless exaggeration. It would be perfectly unreal for us to say in our own person anything of that kind. But this has all been felt by human things constituted as we are, and working on the same revelation of God that we have. If it seems unreal to us, that is because of our own imperfection ; and, moreover, if we study this kind of literature carefully, it will often enter into us only half realized, and in after years will bear fruit in more real and profound penitence.

Above all, we must meditate on God ; upon God as the Father, of infinite love and pity. We must meditate on God in Jesus Christ as shown to us in the Gospels. We must saturate our minds with that divine knowledge of God which lies close at hand all the time. We must meditate on the loving might of the Spirit which maketh intercession for us and healeth our infirmities.

But in it all we have to remember that penitence is not ours to produce. We can do our best to predispose our minds towards a right sorrow, but the gift is of God. Sometimes it tarries long ; sometimes it comes unexpected, unbidden ; but always as the crown of our patient longings and prayers.

Above all, we must never think of penitence as in the end a sad or depressing thing. It is not an end in itself at all, though some people seem to find a kind of inverted joy in a morbid remorse. They seem to think they cannot be pleasing to God unless they

are always weeping ; and so a great many devout persons get into a painful condition of permanent spiritual bedragglement. The aim of penitence is joy. The purpose of it is to clear away whatever is dimming the eyes of our mind to the vision of God. There can be nothing permanently sad about any spiritual exercise which has such an aim. Balance is necessary. It is too easy to think of our sin lightly and easily ; it is also possible to drown the glory of God and the essential delight of human life in overmuch sorrow. We are bound to have sorrow ; but God's will is that our sorrow should be turned into joy.

AMENDMENT

Little is said here about the act of confession. That is not because it is unimportant, but because it has been dealt with elsewhere, and also because I take it that any one who has felt the reality of penitence will immediately seek some way of making a confession before God of those sins for which he grieves. The mere telling out of what we have done deepens penitence, and is an immense relief to the burdened mind. But if it is to be at all real, confession must issue in amendment of life. And so I pass on rather to deal with this matter, because it is at this point that so much penitence fails.

We say with our lips, ' For these my sins I am heartily sorry. I firmly purpose amendment,' but our infirmity of purpose is terrible. Sometimes we feel even at the moment when we are saying the words that we are not really sincere. Can I imagine my life entirely without this sinful indulgence ? That

is the question which requires an absolutely sincere facing and answering. For it means everything. The sin would not be so strong if it were not so beloved. It is that secret evil which is the canker at the heart of our religion. The complete avoidance of all occasions of sin is what is called for. There are some places to which we must not go, some people whom we must not see if we can possibly avoid them. There are some books and pictures at which we cannot bear to look, though they may be perfectly innocuous to other people. But what is far more difficult and fundamental, there are certain thoughts we must not allow ourselves to think. It is not only thoughts which are recognizably sinful which have to be avoided. A vast amount of our trouble comes because we are constantly allowing ourselves in thoughts which bring us up to the brink of sin, though they may be in themselves not actually evil.

There is a kind of no-man's-land in each human heart, lying between good and evil, of which few people realize the dangers. It separates the better part of our life from that part where the peril lies. Let no-man's-land be avoided, and we are not likely to find ourselves in hostile country. Day dreams and speculations, many doubtful affections, and indiscipline of various sorts are there. These are no great loss to anybody's life, and the avoidance of them may form a permanent protection against sin.

When the purpose of amendment has been made and is being kept, the effect upon our prayer is instantaneous. We have been thinking of the terrible sense of inconsistency between prayer and sin. The ineffectiveness of prayer is often not caused by mere

weariness or weakness. It is caused by the haunting sense that it is no use praying when we are deliberately letting ourselves down and allowing slackness. But if we can only get the sense of heroism, the feeling that, weak as we may have been in the past, and recent as our falls may have been, we are at last now set upon amendment of life, this is in itself a great help. We feel a fresh interest in our life of prayer and a new impulse towards it. What was hard and distasteful is hard and distasteful no longer. What sin had made foreign to us is now our true native land. We can pray because we know that we are doing our best to be fit to pray.

But finally, nothing, I confess, amazes me so much as the astonishing generosity of God. He does not seem to mind the dreadful recentness of our sin, if only we are wanting to repent. And He gives so much for so little. A little penitence, a little effort, a little self-discipline, a recently made resolution ; and at once He heaps upon us rewards and joys out of all measure, so far as human reckoning goes. People sometimes talk about the toilsome upward path, the road winding uphill all the way, and so on ; and no doubt there is that side of it ; but it is not all like that. The joys of the spiritual life are what constitute its permanent content. That is why I said just now that penitence is the gate of joy. So we become not merely joyful in ourselves, but so full of gladness that it brims over and blesses others. That is the end of sorrow for sin. There is no qualification to our Lord's saying : 'He that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out.'

CHAPTER XV

ON GROWING OLDER IN PRAYER

WE have thought a good deal in this book about the various means by which we may seek and find God in the ordinary ways of life, as well as in those which are more specifically called religious. Yes, but people say, 'That is all very well while you are young and fresh ; but you will find things very different when you get old and tired.' Let us, therefore, try and look forward a little. We all normally expect a period of old age ; and if we are serious we want to be able to grow old gracefully, and to use our last years well. And further, we are persons whose chief desire is for that advance in prayer which means growth in the knowledge of God. Must we fear that we shall lose this power, or may we hope that it will continue to grow to the end ?

THE FEAR OF GROWING OLD

We are sometimes told that it is wrong to fear old age. We are in the hands of God, and His will must dominate our life ; and whatever He sees fit to send must be good, and should be cause for joy. Yes, but we are human, and our nature makes us

fearful as we look forward to our later years. The mere decay of the body is a painful thought.

> The foot less prompt to meet the morning dew,
> The heart less bounding at emotion new,
> And hope once crushed less quick to spring again.

'Hope once crushed.' That is it. That is what we fear will come from the age of the body; and we are told, too, that there will be illness as our years go on, more frequent and longer and less quick of recovery. There may be permanent weakness. We may be wholly laid aside; or it may be just that we shall not be able to do what once we could. I do not myself admire those persons who quite early in middle age begin to tell you: 'I am not what I once was. I cannot do what once I was able to do.' That spells failure at once. We must guard against that and be sure that God will give us strength for what He wants us to do.

But there is another fear: it is loneliness. If we grow really old, it is in the highest degree probable that we shall gradually lose the friends whom we once loved. This is a grievous thought to have in mind. No one has any right to be so pathetic as Charles Lamb was when he wrote:

> How some they have died, and some they have left me,
> And some are taken from me; all are departed;
> All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

Yes, it is too pathetic, but if we live long it comes true. One after another our friends go. And there is not only the decay of the body to be faced; more than that we fear decay of the mind. We see aged people getting rather irritable, telling their old

stories over and over again, saying the same things and putting the same point of view, until it is very difficult for us younger ones not to be wearily impatient. The danger of old people is to go on saying what they have always said, and die.

But some old people take even this humorously. Not long ago, a friend of mine met a priest of over ninety, with a splendid record of work, who had given his life to the help of many others. 'How are you, Father?' said my friend. 'Oh, quite well,' said the old man, 'only imbecile.' It was pathetic, but noble. Because whatever was true about the old man, he had certainly kept an amazing vigour of mind and a wonderful sympathy with people many years younger than himself.

And there is poverty, perhaps. Who does not fear being old and poor? There is the unmarried woman living in a single room with neither relative nor friend to care. There is the old man dying among strangers, forgotten, and unable to buy what he needs for his urgent wants. Well, you may say that is all very sad. Need it be? Need we fear growing old? We are so tempted to grudge the years as they fly, and we sigh with the poet of old: *O mihi praeteritos referat si Jupiter annos* ('O if God would give back to me the years that are past'). Is it true that as life goes on, and we grow older, the brightness and romance of life fade; that with more frequent illness comes growing love of self and ease? Is this true? Is this all we have to expect, we who are trying to live as children of God and to seek Him in prayer? Is this our goal?

It need not be. And thank God we can prove it,

for we know splendid old men and women, some gone long ago but with famous names, some still living, whose romance has not faded, whose light has not grown dim, whose joy of life has brightened and their love grown deeper ; who know nothing, or very little, of that sadness of which we have been thinking. We all know old people who are beloved, whose death we dread to think of; no one is tired of them. Every one wishes they might live to be a hundred years old because they love them so much.

How is this achieved ? Well, first, these are the people who have succeeded in doing what was laid down in the earlier chapters of this book. They are those who have sought and found God everywhere. They are persons of benevolence, using that word in its fullest sense. They cannot think poorly of other people, because they see God in them all. All things are beautiful to them for the same reason, and therefore they are examples to us of old age, fearless, happy, at peace.

But, secondly, they have learned the secret of sympathy. They know how to feel with the greatest number of people in the deepest possible way. They understand, because they have lived so long and known so many of their fellow men. They have learned to live in the lives of others. So that when old age brings to an end part of the glory of their younger days, they can still live by sympathy with the young and in the attractiveness of others. Their own failing powers are continually re-enforced through their sympathy with the lives of others.

But if sympathy with others is a beautiful part of old age, the gradual falling out of understanding of

the younger people is a real tragedy of old age. Some old people are always complaining that 'So-and-so is drawing away from me; somebody else does not care about me; people are so different from what they were when I was young.' All this prevents us from gaining the grace of old age, of which we are trying to think. The continual and loving study of others, trying to think their thoughts and see their point of view, is what keeps us young. Let us learn to pray as we grow old for the essential and lasting spirit of youth, which is just another name for love.

HOW TO GROW OLD FINELY

But deeper than this. If we are to grow old finely, prayer must last; and not only must it last, it must grow. God forbid that we should grow old and stupid in prayer! We cannot stop natural decay. Just as in illness, only permanently now, the grey matter of our brain cannot move and serve us as it once did. The cynic says that old men get into grooves, and very likely they do. But why not get into good grooves? And if, as we are told, habit grows stronger with the years, it is surely as easy to form habits of prayer as any other kind of habit. If our groove leads towards God, freshness may go, but consistency remains.

Or put it in another way. We all pass through periods of life when we weep for our lost youth. There is no longer the enthusiasm, the alertness that there used to be. Yes, but we have experience instead. I have little sympathy with those people who are always crying out and saying that they wish

they could be young again. I do not want to be young again. I find a security in ripening experience of life which amply makes up for the wild joys of lost youth. And only years can give this experience ; therefore years in this sense are good.

But the real secret of growing old finely is the ability to turn our thoughts into prayer. This can become a habit like anything else ; but the results of such a habit on life are more profound than anything else can be. And if we are to mellow into a graceful old age, our prayer will be for growing conformity with the will of God, and adaptability to whatever state, whether of sickness or of health, of success or failure, which He sees fit to send. When I was training for the priesthood at Cuddesdon, we used to pray every day after Compline that we might be ' wholly devoted to God's service and conformed to His will.' That put in one sentence is the true secret of growing old. Let us then see that we train ourselves in such habits of life and prayer. When all else disappears, they will remain.

' Come, ye children, hearken unto me : I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that lusteth to live, and would fain see good days ? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips that they speak no guile. Depart from evil, and do good ; seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayer.' [1] ' Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.'

[1] Ps. xxxiv. 11–15.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HOLY COMMUNION

PREPARATION

'WHAT is required of them who come to the Lord's Supper?' 'To examine themselves, whether they repent them truly of their former sins, steadfastly purposing to lead a new life; have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of His death; and be in charity with all men.'

There is much difference in thought and practice, even among good people, as to the time and care given to preparation for Holy Communion. Some, by no means careless persons, take little time in direct preparation. Probably they try to be in church a few minutes before the service begins in order to think and pray about the great Gift which they are about to receive. Others—careless people—come with little or no preparation of any kind; others again—conscientious people—who probably come to Communion infrequently, take very long over their preparation, sometimes even extending it over days and weeks.

We must note here that much may depend on two matters. One, whether the communicant in question is accustomed to go to Confession; and the

other the frequency, or infrequency, with which Communion is received. Much must depend also on the communicant's general way of living ; thus, a person who often falls into serious sin and yet honestly desires to repent and to seek the grace of God to help will make a very careful preparation. But the Church, although recognizing these great varieties of experience and practice, lays down certain general rules for all. They are expressed summarily for us in the English Church in the last question and answer of the Catechism.

We cannot deal here with all four requirements laid down, and I propose in this chapter to consider chiefly the first—the need for penitence—and then to pass to one which is not mentioned in our Catechism but which is to-day causing much heart-searching. I mean the ancient and laudable custom of Fasting Communion. It is necessary to write something on this matter because it is one of constant debate in the Church of England, and many communicants desire to understand why Anglo-Catholics, as a whole, are so insistent on the rule of receiving Holy Communion fasting.

PENITENCE

But first—penitence. You will note that the Church Catechism puts this first among the requirements of those who would prepare well for Holy Communion, and that here the Catechism is clearly supported by Holy Scripture and by the rest of the Book of Common Prayer. The peculiar solemnity of the accounts given of the Institution of the Holy Communion by S. Paul and three of the Evangelists

makes clear to us the importance attached by our Lord Himself, and by the early Church, to the receiving of Communion. The Prayer Book, indeed, has the most urgent things to say on this subject and warns us especially against the great peril of unworthy reception. But I need not press the point of our duty to make the most careful preparation for Communion.

What is required, then, is the best we can give in the way of sorrow for sin. This is not an easy matter, and we are always blaming ourselves, as we have already thought, for the lightness and insufficiency of our repentance. The question of Confession—as ordinarily understood—does, and must, arise again at this point, particularly in these days. It involves one of the keenest controversies which has ever exercised the Church. This is very natural, for the demand is a searching one and calls for as complete a surrender as the human soul can well make. The telling of our sins to God in private is one matter ; this *ought* to be as searching and humiliating an exercise as it is possible for us to face ; but in fact, human nature being what it is, confession in the presence of a fellow being—even though he be a priest and, so far as he can be, the impersonal representative of the Church—is an altogether more costing and difficult matter. No wonder that such a matter deeply moves the human mind. But the controversy is clearing up. It is true to say that most people, at least most modern-minded thinkers, have abandoned their prejudice against Confession —they consider that at least in some circumstances and for some people it is good and necessary.

But there is no need to tell Church of England people that they are not compelled to go to Confession. English people know that perfectly well without being told. They are aware not only that no Sacrament can be made compulsory in a free country, but also that the formularies of the Church of England do not demand Confession as a necessity for all. Experience has convinced me that for some persons it is not even helpful, but a positive hindrance to growth in grace.

But surely that is not the question. Whether it be a good thing or a bad thing that auricular Confession should or should not be compulsory, is a point which continually arises and which is endlessly argued. The question the serious Christian has to ask himself is not 'Must I go?' but 'What is best for my spiritual life: how shall I find and express most perfectly that penitence for which I pray, and which will fit me for union with God?'

We have here to think of three stages which may help us to deepen our penitence if we think of them a little carefully.

There is first in the act of confession the clearing of ourselves; a definite desire to cleanse the life of those elements which, by defiling, make it unfit for union with God. With this purpose in view we have to make our self-examination—the exercise by which we strive unflinchingly to find out what in us is wrong and must displease God.

The expression 'self-examination' is a formidable one and frightens a good many people. It may induce, unless we are careful, a morbid frame of mind, though there is not the least reason why it

should do so. Any one who seriously tries to think out his life and see his faults will find that certain matters spring to the mind immediately as being the most dangerous and sinful. There is no need to search about for these things. Then there will be certain other sins, less serious, or less realized, which may be considered, and if there be doubt may be made matter for advice from some one who is an expert in spiritual things. It is important to avoid scrupulosity. Here, again, it would be well to ask for the sane advice of some person whose judgement we can trust.

Self-examination will naturally be followed by Confession in some form. The practice of Confession in the presence of the priest who is at once the minister of God and of the Church has been well dealt with by Dr. K. E. Kirk in the volume of Pastoral Essays entitled *Feed My Sheep*.[1]

The purpose of our Confession is not only to tell our sins and receive the benefit of absolution, but to submit our whole life to the judgement of the Church ; thus, not only are we forgiven for what we have done wrong, but we are set on the way of recovery.

Upon Confession there follows in the natural course sacramental absolution, given, as in the other Sacraments, by an outward sign; in this case the words spoken to assure us of our forgiveness. It has always been the belief of the Church that this absolution rests upon the command of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and conveys to the true penitent the unquestionable forgiveness of all that which is con-

[1] Pages 133–147.

fessed, as well as such matters as through forgetfulness were not actually mentioned. But the benefit of absolution depends upon a real intention of living a better life ; without such intention of amendment it is invalid. In absolution, moreover, strength is given to enable us—the past being done away—to amend our lives as we purpose. This will entail a deliberate intention of avoiding all those occasions which in our past experience have been found to involve danger of sin. Such amendment is impossible without the help of God ; but with such help we are prepared, after absolution, not only for the living of a truer life but for that great Sacrament of union with Christ by which our intention is sealed and we are fortified to resist the attacks of temptation, and to go forward in grace.

FASTING COMMUNION

We must now pass on to another aspect of our preparation for Communion which, though different from Confession, also involves discipline. It is necessary at once to explain what is meant by Fasting Communion since many persons do not know what is signified by the custom. Fasting Communion means that we receive our Communion not merely before breakfast, as commonly understood in England, but before all other food. ' Why ? ' say many people. Well, because it is one of the most ancient rules of discipline of which we have record in the Church. It is not, indeed, in the New Testament, but it is called ' Ecumenical ' ; it has been agreed to and accepted by the entire Catholic Church : for many centuries, indeed, by the whole body of Chris-

tian people. It has been maintained practically without exception for many centuries, and down to the present day by the Churches of Rome and the East.

It is not disputed that in the Church of England during the last three or four hundred years it has largely, though never completely, fallen into disuse ; so that there are many thousands of devout English communicants who have never thought it necessary to fast before their Communion, and who regularly either receive it at some late hour or take some kind of food before starting for an early service. They are, of course, in perfectly good faith. During the last hundred years, however, there has been a great revival of fasting Communion in the Church of England. There are, indeed, some people among us who go so far as to say not only that every person who understands the matter is bound on pain of serious sin to receive Communion fasting, but who even claim that there is now no power of dispensation from the rule. They declare that no one in the Church—neither pope, patriarch, nor bishop—can absolve any one from the strict rule except in immediate danger of death. The argument is that what a General Council has decreed, only a General Council can dispense. This creates an impossible position, since there has been no General Council recognizable by Anglicans for a thousand years, and there is no great hope that there will be another for a very considerable time !

We must be practical. It is impossible to say that every person who receives Communion without fasting is in grave sin. That simply is not a fact.

If a person of good will does not feel bound in conscience to abstain from food before Communion, certainly if he knows nothing, or knows only dimly, of any such rule, it would be absurd and wrong to say that his Communion is a bad one. I do not think any educated Anglo-Catholic would hold such a view.

But there are some persons who, though they would wish to communicate fasting, by reason of their health, are unable—for a time or permanently—to do so. I am most anxious that nothing I write should seem to lead to slackness. There are very many persons who come late, who take a comfortable cup of tea, who could and ought to come fasting. I do not excuse them, if they act against their conscience. I, myself, have always rigidly observed, and I hope I shall always rigidly observe, the fast before Communion ; and I believe that every one who is in good health and wishes to respect the ancient rules of the Church should be strong on this point. But I cannot say that a person who is really ill, though not in immediate danger of death, is to be forbidden to receive Communion unless he is fasting. The Church of Rome has found it necessary to allow for dispensations covering such cases.

It is no real answer to suggest to these people that they should make a Spiritual Communion. A Spiritual Communion is a very difficult exercise and needs a greater devotion than most average persons can bring. That, surely, is why our Lord gave us the Sacraments at all. He knew that our weakness of spiritual apprehension demanded them. And for most of us the outward and visible sign is necessary

if we are to be assured of the inward and spiritual grace.

We cannot ask normally sick people to give up Sacramental Communion or to communicate only infrequently, because for some perfectly sufficient reason they are unable to receive fasting. That is one side of the question.

But there is another side to it too often lost sight of in our easy days. The rule of fasting Communion is as venerable and as widespread as any custom of the Catholic Church. It is observed, as we saw just now, to this day by the great majority of Christian men and women. It deserves the most serious attention of all of us. For all of us fasting is a good discipline. We are much too comfortable about our religion and there ought to be more discipline about it. Here is one point at which we can bring it in. And, further, I would say that we ought not to decide the point of fasting Communion on our own responsibility.

We were thinking just now that there were some people in the Church of England who would not allow any dispensation except in the case of a person at the point of death. This is impossible rigorism. *We must have dispensations.* It must be possible for us to go to some one and say, 'I have tried my best to observe the rule of fasting Communion. I acknowledge the force of the ancient discipline but for good reasons I can no longer do so. If I attempt it I shall either be ill or lose my Communion.' And so many Anglo-Catholics hold that the bishop of the diocese should be asked to dispense in such cases. This may sometimes seem unreal in the present state

of the Church of England, yet I do not see any other way out of the difficulty. The whole thing may seem incredibly small to some of my readers—I can only ask them to believe that there are many people whose learning and holiness cannot be doubted who feel just as keenly on the subject as the simple and unlearned.

We shall surely feel, we who care greatly about our communion, that the more we can hedge it about with reverence and awe and discipline, the more it will mean to our spiritual life. We shall not come suddenly, having just decided to 'go up' perhaps because others do. We shall desire to come early—and fasting. We shall welcome this very small discipline because we believe that, in our Communion, God comes from heaven to earth; and because we know that every Communion unites us to our Lord and to our fellow members here and in the world beyond in the Church of Christ.

FREQUENT COMMUNION

All who have watched carefully the religious movements of the time in which we live, will have noticed that during the last fifty years there has been a great increase in the frequency of Communion by people who are trying to live the spiritual life. I do not know how far this is true of the Churches of the East; but in Western Europe and in America—in all places, indeed, to which the Roman and Anglican Churches have gone—this is one of the most important spiritual advances of many generations.

In old days it was not so. Indeed it is probably true that since the first ages of the Church Commu-

nion has been infrequently made by the great body of Christian people. The beginnings are obscure ; but it looks as if, in the early Church, Communion daily—or at least on each Sunday—was the common rule for all. The memory of the Lord was recent and precious. Men recalled His last command laid upon them before He suffered ; and so we are told that they ' continued in the Apostles' fellowship and in the breaking of bread.' After the early days there were many fluctuations, although as a rule Communion tended, at least for the lay people, to be less and less frequent.

The daily Mass certainly appeared during the later Middle Ages, although in most cases without lay communicants. It would seem that at least from the time of S. Cyprian in the middle of the third century the daily Mass was common ; but for the ordinary laity the ' Easter Duties ' was the rule—that is, Confession and Communion once a year. Indeed, one of the demands made in the rebellion known as the ' Pilgrimage of Grace,' during the reign of Henry VIII, was that the lay people should not be required to communicate more than once a year. This was a protest against the new rule of three Communions.

No doubt there were always a devout few who communicated often. It may be seen, for instance, in the lives of many of the saints ; but such people were very much the exception, and not the rule.

At the era of the Reformation an attempt was made in England to increase the frequency of Communion. The eighth rubric at the end of the Communion Service in the 1662 Prayer Book lays

it down that it should be at least 'three times a year, of which Easter to be one.' This rule governed English custom for three centuries and is only just passing out of observance. There are many still living who can remember the time when, in the average parish church, 'Communion Sunday,' coming three or four times in the year, was a marked day, and when there was not a Celebration on other Sundays. No doubt this custom often entailed a serious view of the greatness of the Sacrament, and involved a very careful preparation ; but it has been found insufficient in our later days.

We may say, then, that in the earliest days of the Church very frequent Communion seemed to have been the general rule. When the Church became swamped by hundreds and thousands of half-converted persons—often little more than baptized pagans—Communion tended, no doubt in many cases rightly, to become infrequent. Only recently in the Western Church generally, and also in England, has there been a return to something like the primitive rule. It is notorious that even yet there are many thousands of very sound English Churchmen and Churchwomen who do no more than keep to the strict rule of the Book of Common Prayer and communicate about three times a year—at the great festivals.

THE REVIVAL

Now let us consider more carefully the return to the custom of the early Church which has come in our day. The change has been obvious even in the lifetime of some of the younger among us. It is

not only that there is a Sunday Celebration at least in nearly every church and college chapel, but also that the number of cathedrals and churches in which there is a daily Celebration constantly increases. But it is essential to note that this revival has almost exactly coincided with the unparalleled falling away from the Church and Sacraments which we are also witnessing. It would not be easy to trace the connection which exists, obscurely, between the two movements ; but it is interesting to remember that both the revivals of religion which have distinguished the history of the Church of England during the last two hundred years at least began with a movement towards more frequent Communion. Those who know the history of the Wesleyan Revival will recall the historic scene when John Wesley and his friends, all young men, excited the derision of the University and City of Oxford by going off to S. Mary's for Communion ; while that other movement which began at Oxford, the Catholic Revival in which we are living to-day, is the almost immediate cause of the increased number of Celebrations and Communions which we see to-day. The English churches in which there is not a Sunday Celebration are few, and the number of services continually increase.

On the other hand, when all has been said, though the number of *Communions* increases, the actual number of persons who *receive* Communion is probably nothing like so great as it was. Some observers think that the increase of the population has been so great in the last hundred years that there are actually more communicants in England to-day

than there were a century ago ; I doubt it ; and even if it were so, it does not make things any happier, for a hundred years ago nearly all English people received Holy Communion sometimes, while now only a comparatively small proportion of them ever do so.

On one point, however, there is no doubt. A far greater number of people receive their Communion frequently than was the case fifty or even twenty-five years ago. In many churches the altars are thronged by hundreds of communicants every Sunday. In some churches every week-day as many as eighty or one hundred Communions are received ; while the increased number of places where there is a daily Celebration accounts for many more. Six or eight or ten communicants a day at a growing number of churches mounts up quickly into great numbers.

Nor is there any doubt that side by side with this movement goes a general deepening of the spiritual life of an increasing body of Christian people. This is the most important aspect of the Church life of our day.

A personal rule

It must be obvious, I think, that any attempt to lay down a general rule for the reception of Communion is impossible and would be dangerous. The rule must depend so much on the life, on the presence or absence of serious sin, on the desire for Communion or the lack of it, and on the whole outlook of the person concerned.

That is not to say that because we have at present

difficulty about prayer, or because we are little moved by the things of faith, and have only slight love of God, that we are not to communicate more frequently. Often the opposite is true. Many thousands of English people receive Holy Communion once a month. I suppose a great number of priests in the Church of England instruct their candidates for Confirmation to keep this rule ; but it is much to be hoped that they qualify their advice by adding the words ' at first '—for once a month is a good rule to begin with, but a bad one to end with. If we considered the example of the primitive Church—so near to our Lord's own time—we certainly shall not consider once a month to be sufficient. Nor shall we if we think of the great movement of the Spirit of God in our day throughout so large a part of the Catholic Church.

In normal religious life the frequency of Communion should grow. And the reason is clear. God has provided for us this sacramental means of union with Himself. In our present state of existence Communion is the closest means of touch with God that the average person possesses. Our question should be not, ' Why should I go often to Communion ? ' but ' Why do I go so seldom ? ' It is when the question is thus put that we begin to understand what has caused the revival of the practice of frequent Communion.

There are two classes of persons who would seem naturally called to more frequent reception of Holy Communion. First, those who are seeking better things in their life of prayer. I often wonder, when I remember that the inward and spiritual grace of

the Holy Communion is the strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the Body and Blood of Christ, and that the effect of it is that 'we may evermore dwell in Him and He in us'—why so many vestry books should show on week-days two, three, seven, ten communicants only; there are other churches where fifty, sixty, or one hundred is often the rule. It is not, I think, that the communicants in such churches as these desire the life of prayer more truly than the others, but they have found the way to it more clearly than others through their Communion.

And the second class of people who are surely in need of Communion are the tempted and weak. These poor souls often come very seldom because they are under the fatal impression that because they are tempted they must not come often. The exact reverse is the case. I do not say that these need Communion more than those who apparently are leading holier lives; but I do say that if they want to win their battle through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ they will strive to deepen their penitence and to come more often to the Sacrament of His love. We may be very sure that God has not brought us back to something like the state of things in the early Church without having some definite purpose in it. If the need is urgent; if we are required, as we believe, to shine as lights in the world, because there are comparatively so few of us; if this is so, we may be certain that the call to more frequent Communion comes to us because our Lord wants us, not merely to deepen our own spiritual life, but also to be the means of bringing our country back to His Church.

CHAPTER XVII

THANKSGIVING

IT is difficult to be patient with those excellent people who, in prose or verse or in daily conversation, are continually assuring us that this life is a weary pilgrimage.

> We are but strangers here,
> Heaven is our home ;
> Earth 's but a desert drear,
> Heaven is our home.

And so on.

It is true, of course, that here we have no continuing city ; but we seek one. And though it may be true that we all pass through times when endurance rather than enjoyment of life is our mood, yet the seeking of the City of God is in itself an absorbing joy. A Greek poet once set up this epitaph on the tomb of his friend : ' I weep not for thee, O dearest of friends, for thou knewest many fair things, and in turn God dealt thee thy lot of ill.' It may not be entirely Christian but it is very near it, and exceedingly wise.

LIFE IS WHAT WE MAKE IT

To say that life is what we make it, is what we commonly call a platitude or truism ; that is, a proposition so obvious and so generally agreed upon that it is foolish to argue further about it. And

indeed it would be foolish to do so if we all always acted upon what we believe without question to be true. It is just because we are always repeating good sayings, and believing them, without acting upon them, that a great deal of the unnecessary misery of life comes upon us. People say, 'I am sick of hearing these old-fashioned things, tell me something new,' when what they ought to be doing is bending their best will to live up to that which they unquestionably accept as true.

Let us, therefore, consider one or two further platitudes—simple facts which we all admit to be true, but which in fact we neglect. We take it in general for granted that a person who suffers many misfortunes ; who has to bear pain, illness, sorrow, bereavement, failure, is a person to be pitied. We think of his life as broken and maimed. We more than half expect him to be dull and gloomy, and we hope he will be able to bear life patiently till death comes and releases him. Whereas, all the time experience proves that this is untrue.

We all know people who, if the view of the Job's wives of this world—male or female—were true, might reasonably curse God and die ; but they do not. They lose all ; their only and beloved child dies ; they are thwarted in their right ambitions ; they lose all their money ; they are forsaken by those whom they thought to be their friends. But over and over again we find that such persons are not embittered or unhappy—they are calm, contented, at peace.

And on the other hand we take it for granted that those persons whose life flows evenly, who have success, riches, good health, good position, are happy

people. We do indeed make another truism, and say when we ourselves are poor or disappointed, that riches do not make happiness, anyway for other people ; and we observe that the petted children of fortune who have all that the world can give—and sometimes, apparently, all that God can give too—spend a great part of their time bemoaning the sadness of their life ; making themselves and others miserable. A friend of mine witnessed the other day a touching picture of three or four millionaires in a country house, on a day when the weather was too bad for them to go out and shoot pheasants. They lounged in easy chairs bemoaning their misery, and the total lack of interest in life. They had no other interests in life than the business of making money and the pleasure of killing. Happy souls ! And yet, when all has been said, we envy the rich and successful, and we say that if our lot were cast in so goodly a heritage we should have nothing to grumble at ; we would make a right use of our good fortune. We are very perverse about these things.

The point is that life is what we make it, and can be happy in so far as we are trying to correspond with the grace of God. In the Middle Ages men spent immense time and learning in searching for what was called the ' Philosopher's Stone.' This stone had the miraculous property of turning whatever touched it to gold. They never found it, for in the mineral world no such thing exists. But in the spiritual world the ' Philosopher's Stone ' exists very really indeed. What is this gift in life which enables some people to turn all things, even the grimmest and most dull, into joy ?

WHAT MAKES HAPPINESS

Some years ago when the first Lord Avebury died, a picture of him was published in one of the illustrated newspapers. I cut it out and pasted it in a scrap-book at which I often look, because it seemed to me to be exactly what an old man's face should be like. There was experience in it ; thought, marks of pain, and the wrinkles and white hair which come to all of us who live long enough. But there was also a geniality, a serenity, a loving-kindness which are surely meant to be the effect of any really wise man's experience of life. It is interesting that one of Lord Avebury's best-known books is entitled *The Pleasures of Life*. It is years since I read it, and I cannot remember in detail the kind of things he says in it ; but his own face and expression in old age are sufficient proof that he knew what he was writing about.

And indeed it might well take a book, many books, to detail the pleasures of life ; the secret of this kind of joy is manifold and complex. We may perhaps take one of them as being typical of the others ; I mean the sustained attitude of thankfulness ; the orientation of spirit which does not only thank God now and then for special blessings, but is a deepset habit of life. Persons who live by such a rule are always seeking and recognizing occasions of thankfulness for all things small and great ; perhaps, especially, for those which come unexpectedly ; indeed, causes of thanksgiving are innumerable even for those whom the world would regard as hardest hit.

When I was preparing for ordination the principal of the theological college advised us, on one occasion, to take pencil and paper, and write down all the matters for which we had reason to be thankful to God. One smiles, of course, and does not do that kind of thing ; but the advice brought home to me the fact that had I started I should never have stopped—for the mercies of God, past and present, were beyond all calculation. So that if all life could be given up to thanksgiving it would be too short.

The trouble is that most of us need really big occasions to call us to thanksgiving at all—recovery from illness, preservation from obvious danger, or the harvest festival ! All these are good and necessary ; but unless the habit of thanksgiving is far more widely spread than that, it is partial and incomplete. The habit of thanksgiving means that we are grateful when the most trifling thing which might have gone wrong goes right ; when the little anxiety is removed ; when the passing word of kindness is spoken to us ; and that we recognize the thousand other occasions which for the watchful Christian come every day. How many of those who read this book have ever thanked God for soap and hot water ? But what excellent creatures of God they are ! That is just a homely illustration of an attitude of mind which easily and at once leads from earth to heaven.

It is narrated by George Borrow that once when he was walking in the country he met a gipsy, who said to him : ' Life is sweet, brother.' ' Do you think so,' said Borrow. ' Think so,' said the gipsy. ' There 's night and day, brother, both sweet things ; sun, moon, and stars, brother, all sweet things.

There 's likewise a wind on the heath ; life is very sweet, brother.' Volumes could not say more.

And who that loves his fellows can measure the call to thanksgiving for friendship ; for the attractiveness of youth, the experience of middle life and the calm quiet of old age, as we see them in those whom we love ? And in what we call sorrow, too, the people who look at life so will find deep cause for thankfulness. Humiliation, bereavement, disappointment may be turned into joy. You have only to ask many of the very best people who have suffered most what they have found to be true about it all, and you will not find that they rebel and are sad, but that their joy has been reborn to a fuller life through the pain they have undergone.

No doubt this also will be scorned as a sentimental platitude by some of my readers. All I say is, look at life, and look at people ; see them as they really are, and it will be clear that for many people, at least, these things are plain fact.

But here we come to a warning. What prevents all this from being true for so many men and women ? There is a variety of causes, but one is certainly fatal. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews bids his readers beware ' lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.' We know well enough that one hatred, persisted in, is sufficient to destroy any person's peace and happiness. No one is so pitiable as he whose life is poisoned by such bitterness.

I do not know any analysis of this kind of danger and misery, and of release from it, than the familiar *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Everybody learned the

story at school. How the mariner sailed away with his shipmates into the Southern Seas, and all went well for many months ; and how there came then a beautiful bird flying after the ship ; and how one day the mariner, in a fit of inexplicable and insensate rage (perhaps the outcome of long boredom), one day shot the albatross with his crossbow. After that all was ill. The wind dropped, the ship lay becalmed, the sun blistered the deck, there was no water ; and one after another the sailors died, cursing him who had brought the misery on them. And he describes the utter misery from which death would not come and release him :

> Water, water everywhere,
> And all the boards did shrink ;
> Water, water everywhere,
> Nor any drop to drink.
>
> I look'd to heaven, and tried to pray ;
> But or ever a prayer had gusht,
> A wicked whisper came, and made
> My heart as dry as dust.

And then he looks out of the ship, and tells us what he sees :

> The very deep did rot : O Christ !
> That ever this should be !
> Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
> Upon the slimy sea.

At last the change came. The rain of God poured down and quenched his thirst. The gentle sleep from heaven slid into his soul. And when he awoke he looked out again from the ship ; and once more he tells us what he saw.

Beyond the shadow of the ship
I watched the water-snakes :
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they rear'd the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire :
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coil'd and swam ; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things ! No tongue
Their beauty might declare ;
A spring of love gusht from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware ;
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.

The self-same moment I could pray . . .

' Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs upon the slimy sea.'

' O happy living things ! No tongue their beauty might declare.'

You see what has happened ? The creatures of the sea were the same all the time ; it was the same man, the same eyes, the same scene, but another heart. And the whole is summed up in famous words which every child knows by heart :

He prayeth well who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small ;
For the dear God Who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHY DO I GO TO CHURCH?

THERE is no escaping the fact (though it is sometimes exaggerated) that in modern days there is a great falling off in church-going. At one time people made excuses for it ; they said, poetically, that they found it more helpful to worship God under the free dome of heaven, or more prosaically that they found nature helpful. Now they frankly drive their car or play golf, without excuse ; and soon they will have forgotten that it was ever thought necessary to make excuses for not going to church.

An alternative argument still often used is that those who don't go are just as good as those who do ; often better. And this is sometimes not so untrue as it ought to be. A short time ago I read a quotation used very amusingly by a writer in the *Modern Churchman*. He notes that King Jotham, of Judah, was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and did that which was right in the sight of the Lord ; howbeit, he entered not into the house of the Lord ![1] It is a text to be meditated upon by religious thinkers in our day.

Let us then take stock of the situation. We find with surprise that, even in Apostolic days, in the

[1] 2 Chron. xxvii. 1, 2.

first vigour of Christianity, there were already persons who had given up going to church.[1] It is pathetically obvious to us all that this process has gone on to an alarming extent to-day ; and I think it is worth while to ask ourselves why we are among the small number of those who in modern days regard public worship as one of their ordinary duties. Why do we go to church ? Let us think that out first, and then pass on to consider our reasons for regarding the decline in church attendance as a real tragedy, not so much from the point of view of the Church or the clergy, but of the nation.

WHY DO WE GO TO CHURCH ?

No doubt we shall answer that many motives combine to take us there, and that it is difficult to isolate any of them. Nevertheless, let us take in order some of the inducements, looking at them in an ascending scale ; beginning with the lowest, and working up to those which are more excellent. I can only suggest some of them, and only those which seem to me to be the outstanding reasons ; no doubt each reader will have some others to add for himself. First and lowest, then, I suppose most of us come to church partly from habit. We grew up in a family in which church-going was the normal thing. Our father and mother went to church, and we cannot remember the first time we were taken there ; it all goes back into our infant days. It has always been familiar to us ; as long as we can remember we have gone to church, and, since we were confirmed, to our communion from time to time. It

[1] Heb. x. 25.

has all grown into a good habit which now it might even be hard to break if we tried.

And, secondly, there are aesthetic, emotional reasons—reasons which have to do with our feelings, which help to bring us to the corporate worship of God. We are fond of church music, or, perhaps, as is very common, we love some forms of church music, and detest other forms ; and we attend that church at which we can hear the kind of music we like. And, again, we are all of us attracted to a greater or less degree by what is known as ritual or ceremonial. Here, again, we may dislike some kinds of ceremonial and like other kinds ; but without ritual of some sort no public worship is possible ; and we find that the measure of ceremonial to which we have grown accustomed is very far from being for us merely an outward thing ; it is part of the atmosphere of worship, and it brings us very truly into the presence of God, through the associations which it has for us.

For many of us even the archaic Tudor English of the Prayer Book has a fascination which is exercised by no modern forms of speech. And so, altogether, we find worship, especially in the church we love, inexpressibly beautiful and touching. It kindles our feeling and lifts up our hearts to God.

The third of our primary reasons for coming to church is the sense of duty. Notice that I put this higher than the emotional attraction, because, for many of us, it means sacrifice. It is good that we should love the worship of God, if we can ; but we who feel joy in it are sometimes apt to regard those who come primarily from the sense of duty as some-

how lower in the spiritual scale than ourselves. I am not at all sure that it is so ; I think it may be an even greater thing for those people to come to church who are rather bored by it all, and yet come faithfully and regularly, than it is for those who love it. If obedience is better than sacrifice, and if church-going is for some people an act of distasteful obedience, then I think we must put those simple, unemotional souls high in the scale of the service of God. These questions, however, are dealt with in the chapter on Obligation in Religion.

And, fourthly, we come to church to learn. The modern world is impatient of sermons. Superior people tell us that good books are far better than inferior sermons, and that they prefer to learn by reading rather than by hearing ; while we are all familiar with the oft-repeated hope that ' it will be a short sermon this morning ' or the sigh that ' the sermon was dreadfully long to-night.' I hardly trust myself to speak of those unhappy creatures—England is thronged by them—who learn their religion from the newspapers. It is a sheer disaster that every pert journalist who dares, in his ignorance, to deal with the things pertaining to the kingdom of God should have a vastly larger public than the expert in the realm of the Spirit. This is, I believe, the most fatal danger of the day. But enough of this tragedy. When all has been said about books, and even about the wireless, the ordinary man or woman still needs, and will always need, the presence and voice of the human teacher.

It is not, however, only through the sermon that we learn in church. The building itself, so familiar

and so beloved, every stone and window of which is for us charged with spiritual associations of our past, is a mighty teacher of religion. It is not only that our own repentances, and communions, and prayers, and thanksgivings cling to the church where we have for years worshipped God, though that is much. But we feel also that the place is sanctified by the presence and the memory of those whose spiritual experiences have been far deeper than ours. Indescribably the atmosphere the saints of God have made penetrates us as deeply as we are capable of receiving it into our consciousness. 'It is good for me to be here,' we say. Everything teaches me of the things of God.

And the fifth and highest motive for coming to church is to give of our best. So far we have thought chiefly of what we gain from the worship of God. But all that is secondary; generosity is the heart of true religion. Every time we worship, best of all when we offer the Holy Sacrifice, we are trying to give, not merely 'ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice,' but that which is far greater than anything we could of ourselves offer:

> That only offering perfect in Thine eyes,
> The one true, pure, immortal Sacrifice.

THE FALLING OFF

If all this is true; if divine worship is so great a thing; if it means for men and women happiness, obedience, education, worship—then surely we must regard it as the greatest of tragedies that the vast majority of our countrymen have given up going to

church at all, or else go so seldom that it counts for little in their lives.

I carry back my mind to a place familiar to me. Within a mile of the centre of Birmingham are many large churches, built to accommodate great congregations. They were set where they are because they were necessary ; their doors and their spacious galleries were provided because the men and women of Birmingham wanted to worship God on Sundays. I wonder how many people there are now in most of them on an ordinary Sunday morning ? I wonder how many—or how few—of them are really needed by the populations among which they stand ?

But there is only too little need to labour this point. It is possible to exaggerate the loss ; but we all know that within the last fifty years congregations have greatly fallen off ; while the contrast with things as they were eighty or ninety years ago is dreadful indeed. Read Dickens, or Thackeray, or Charlotte Brontë, or George Eliot, and compare the church-going then and now, and this will be plain enough.

Excusing the Facts

When things of this kind are said, people sometimes try to account for, or excuse, the facts. They will say that if the number of worshippers in these days is less, the quality is higher. I will return to this argument. Others say that apparently God is allowing history to repeat itself ; that as in years gone by His own people Israel, who had fallen away from Him, were brought back by a small faithful remnant, so He may be doing again. Yes, He may

be ; but it is no business of ours (not being at all certain of any such thing) to acquiesce in such a theory, still less to regard ourselves as the holy remnant. What we want to see is a God-loving, God-worshipping England ; and we are tragically far from that at present.

Other people tell us that ' those who do not go to church are just as good as those who do.' I am sure this is not true. There are only too many hypocritical church-goers, as we all know to our cost ; and we are all backward enough in carrying out the spiritual, social, and moral teachings of our Master. There are no doubt also some strong souls who can find and worship God without the aid of public worship. Whatever we may think of their attitude towards Christian obedience, the fact remains that most of the talk about finding God better under the open dome of heaven than in church is little better than cant. The truth is that most ordinary persons who do not go to church quickly lose touch with spiritual ideas and eternal values. They cease to worship and pray anywhere in any real sense at all, and fall into the lamentable state of irreligion which is destroying the best of our English traditions.

People talk as though the decline of church-going were a disaster to the Church first of all ; as if the Church and the clergy were greatly to be pitied on account of it. It is disappointing to the clergy, no doubt, to find congregations small and communicants few. But we need not pity the Church of God. She has passed triumphantly through times of trial before, and she will do it again when our puny generation has gone ; she will not suffer. But

I do, with my whole heart, pity the English nation and those men and women who love God. A very slight acquaintance with history will tell us what becomes of nations which become materialistic, pleasure-loving, and godless. I tremble for my nation and my countrymen, not for my Church.

what can be done ?

This is all very sad. What can be done ? I do not think there is very much to be learned from our outside critics, in the armchair or in the newspaper ; but I believe we have the cure partly in our own hands. In order to realize this we must face one other very disagreeable fact. I believe that one of the chief reasons—only one of them, of course—for the feebleness of organized Christianity in England to-day is the glaring discrepancy between the Christian ideal and the actual lives of Christians.

I know that it is unreasonable for a man to say that he will never enter a church door again because he has heard a server tell a filthy story, or because once a churchwarden cheated, or a district visitor slandered him. Very unreasonable, yes ; but, all the same, that server, or churchwarden, or district visitor, or the other communicant who caused the scandal, is a very wicked person. Is it not most disgraceful for a communicant to bring such dishonour on the sacred cause for which he stands ? It is not merely that he imperils his own soul ; that would not matter so much. The pity is that he brings shame on the Church of Christ, and causes the Name of his Master to be lightly esteemed, in addition to the sin of driving away, perhaps for ever, some

man or woman from the Church of God on earth. Yet these very persons, men and women, will be regular and frequent communicants, and will quite often come and ask to have a high rule for the spiritual life suggested to them ! They are hardly at all conscious of their wickedness. Are we, after all, so much better than those Pharisees who kept the law in details and left undone such trifles as mercy, judgement, and truth ?

I think I should like to see our communicants binding themselves by a rule almost brutally simple in regard to the things they will not do, before they begin to consider lofty resolutions for their spiritual life. If we could decide that certain actions and words are impossible for the servants of Christ, we should at least have a good foundation for our positive religious life. On that we could build a new and better Christian example, which might at last win the world. So at least we can make this contribution of the great task of bringing our country back to Christ. We can resolve to work out to the fullest of our power the real implications of Christianity in common life. We can see to it that our light so shines before men that they see our good works, and glorify our Father Who is in heaven.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PARISH CHURCH

WE are constantly reminded in our modern days of the great importance of the ' associations ' of our life. It is impressed upon us that we are all the time being affected, and our character being moulded, by the persons and things and ideas surrounding us : by the events which occur to us : by the circumstances, in the literal sense of that much-abused word, of our life. Our reaction to these circumstances is partly conscious, but much more unconscious. We do not realize now much we are being shaped and changed by our associations. But that is why they matter so much : that is why we must attempt, so far as lies in our power, to surround ourselves with good and profitable circumstances : to see that the persons with whom we associate, the ideas by which our minds are affected, the objects which enter into our minds by hearing and seeing, shall be as excellent as possible.

Now, of all the associations in the lives of those of us who are trying to be faithful Christians—who are penitents and communicants ; whose chief joy is the worship of God—few are so potent as those of our parish church : that actual building in which we have been accustomed for years—perhaps for the whole of our life—to pray and to praise God.

Every time we enter it there descends upon us an indescribable sensation which we could not possibly express in words, but which is as profound as any experience which comes to us. It is something which for us is special to a particular building. Other churches may be greater, more illustrious, more ancient ; yet, for us, this is the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

Whence, then, is this strange and holy atmosphere ? How is it made ? Let me ask you to consider three special cases of buildings in which I have myself found it. Not long ago I was in Rome, and happened one evening to cross an ancient bridge into that part of the city which is called the Trastevere, i.e. the part of Rome across the Tiber. I walked along one or two streets, and found myself in the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere : our Lady across the Tiber, as we should say. It is a very ancient and illustrious church : one of those which first sprang up soon after the day when the Emperor Constantine made Christianity a tolerated religion in the Roman Empire. It is a very splendid church : I stood on a floor of marble mosaic ; on either side of me were rows of great marble columns, taken in the fourth century from some neighbouring pagan temple. On the capitals of the pillars were still the heads of the old gods. A hundred years or so ago some too zealous cardinal had begun to chop them off, but he soon got tired, and left the rest still gazing down, as they have done through the centuries, on the Christian Mysteries. Above the altar blazed a great mosaic, set there when Stephen was king in England, when S. Mary's church across the Tiber

was already eight hundred years old. It was a week-day when I was there, and the parish priest was giving an instruction on one of the central mysteries of the Catholic religion to a congregation of simple parish folk. It is a poor parish, but the Trastevere prides itself on its ancient and unmixed blood, and there may well have been listening to the sermon men and women whose ancestors two thousand years ago had worshipped Jupiter and Apollo, Isis and Osiris, on the same site. But the central thing for me was the thought that here for sixteen hundred years was an unbroken tradition of Christianity ; in this place for sixteen centuries the Holy Sacrifice has been offered, Confessions and Communions made. Here was the home of baptism, confirmation, worship, prayer. The result was that I was driven to my knees. Everywhere flooding and filling the whole building, was the atmosphere of ancient holiness.

A fortnight later I was in Warwickshire. There, hidden away among the country lanes, is the church of S. Mary, built by the Knights Templars at Temple Balsall. It is a small building compared with the great church of S. Mary across the Tiber : it is only five hundred years old, as compared with the sixteen hundred of the Roman church. It was built at the best and purest moment of our English Gothic. It could hardly have been more different than it was from the other building where I had so lately been. Here were no marble pillars ; here was no brilliant mosaic ; here were no memories of the ancient pagan gods. It was very beautiful, with its splendid fourteenth-century tracery and carving, its fine modern glass, and its beauty of revived devotion. But in one

respect there was no difference. Here, too, all was redolent of the atmosphere of ancient holiness. Here, too, one had to kneel down on the pavement and thank God for centuries of Christian worship and sacrament.

Two or three days afterwards I knelt in a third church, very different again from the other two—a church full of tender memories for me—S. Alban's, Birmingham. It was a church younger in number of years than myself ; I might have seen it being built. It, too, is a beautiful building ; but you would have thought that it could not for centuries have acquired the atmosphere of Santa Maria in Trastevere and S. Mary at Temple Balsall. Yet it had ; in a short time it had fulfilled a long time ; it would seem that this wonderful thing is independent of time, for here was just the same sense of ancient holiness and prayer. What makes it, then ?

We can trace several stages, or 'levels,' in it, I think. In each of those cases there was a day when a bishop came—in the fifth century, the fourteenth century, the nineteenth century ; and consecrated each of those churches to the worship of God. That, however, was not a final event ; it was the beginning of a process which will continue, as I hope to show, so long as the building stands. It is part of the outward history. In the case of all parish churches we have other recorded events—additions to the fabric, restorations, new furnishing, and the rest. Sometimes we find on the wall a list of the vicars or rectors of the parish, and most interesting they often are. I remember not long ago being in a country church in Kent, and looking rather casually through the names of the rectors. There were the ancient

local names, Thomas de la Hythe, William de Romney (I invent them, for I do not accurately remember—they are near enough), of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Later there were our familiar Edward Bakers and George Carpenters. But in the reign of Henry VIII, I was startled to read that Thomas (Cardinal) Wolsey and Prospero Colonna had been rectors of Lydd. It is unlikely, I should think, that either of them was more than an absentee pluralist—the latter most likely an English agent at the papal court, probably an important cardinal, who never set foot in England. But the names are illustrious and romantic enough at Lydd, in Kent. They were connected with the church and parish, at any rate.

More intimate history may be read on many monuments and tombs in our churches. I love to spend half an hour or so in a town or country church reading the inscriptions. The later ones are often more interesting than the earlier ; it is a foolish affectation to despise the eighteenth century. I well remember that, when I served for eight years the ancient church of S. Thomas of Canterbury, outside the West Gate of Oxford, I used often to read an inscription on the chancel wall opposite to where I sat. It began thus: 'I being seventi and iiii years of age departed this life the xxii daye of June 1578, the xx year of Quene Elizabeth.' There follows a short account, saying that he had been four times chosen Mayor of Oxford, and that his name was William Tylcoke. He was born in the reign of old King Henry VII: he had lived through Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth. He had seen the

whole of the Reformation ; he had probably been present at the burning of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishops of London and Worcester in the city ditch opposite Balliol College. He was elected M.P. for Oxford under Philip and Mary, November 12, 1554. I suppose he had worshipped God for many years in S. Thomas's church ; and there at last he was buried. This is just one case of many thousands who lived, worshipped, died, and are laid in or near our parish churches. Any one with an historic sense and a little imagination will find matter enough for thought here.

But there are other sources of spiritual history. Most of us at one time or another have looked at those dusty and dull-looking volumes, the parish registers, in which are recorded baptisms, marriages, and burials. Sometimes they contain very illustrious entries. Those who have been in Stratford-on-Avon church will remember that just on your right as you enter, is a glass case, containing two of the ancient registers. The one records the baptism, on April 26, 1564, of William, son of John and Mary Shakespeare ; the other tells us that, on April 25, 1616, was buried 'Wm. Shakespeare, gent.' That is all : but what a world of history and romance is contained in those simple words !

Well, those entries, we may say, are almost beyond comparison, famous. Yes ; but has it ever occurred to us that those musty registers in ordinary churches are full of a wonderful secret history ? They record the baptisms, the marriages, the burials, of the people of God who have loved and praised Him in that building. Here they came, known and unknown ; here

they worshipped God, offered to Him their penitence, their prayer, their joys or griefs ; here they were united with Him in Holy Communion ; here their bodies rested for a brief space before the altar ; hence they were carried to their graves. Among them have been true saints of God, many of them. Their lives and prayers have carried on and intensified the bishop's consecration in the years gone by. Here have gone up to God agonies of souls, strong prayers against temptation, hearts wounded by bereavement and disappointment ; yes, and praise and thanksgiving, the dedication of lives to God's service, gratitude for joy and peace. The very walls seem to know of it all : on the altar, the glass, the pictures, the eyes of the people of God have rested. Here they found strength and hope : from this holy place they have gone out again to face whatever of labour or trial life had for them. So it has been in Rome, at Temple Balsall, in Birmingham—in all the innumerable shrines of God. So there has come to be the deep sense of consecration—the atmosphere of ancient holiness.

Into all this we enter, we of a later day, with our needs and our power to give. Our church is to us not merely a building, ancient or modern ; it is the storehouse of spiritual wealth, stored up and increased by the holy people of Christ's kingdom. The lot is fallen unto us in a fair ground ; we have a goodly heritage. But that is not all ; we have received richly, we must also give. Our associations are part of it all, and are making it for the future generations. It may be that we still serve God in

the very building where we were baptized, where we made our first confession, where we were confirmed, and in which we constantly receive the Holy Communion. Here we, too, have poured out ourselves to God ; here we have offered our prayers and praises and thanksgivings. Here, perhaps, our bodies, too, will be brought to rest for a few hours ; here our requiem will be said, and hence what was mortal of us will be borne to rest.

It all comes out, surely, in a great patriotism for our own church. We do not forget the wider Church and kingdom of God ; but here is our home. But more ; we desire to give to those who come after that which we ourselves so richly enjoy. As the centuries go by, our church, please God, will still stand where it does now. Other generations will follow us, and will worship God here when we are gone. We may be utterly forgotten. Perhaps a stone or a metal plate may record our names and dates ; probably there will be mention of us in the register books. But so far as this world goes, it will most likely be as if we had never been. We shall be with God—we hope. But what we gave will remain in the atmosphere of our beloved church, so that in three hundred or four hundred years' time there will still be something of us left. We shall see to it, then, that our prayer and penitence, our worship and sacraments, shall be not unworthy of our dear spiritual home in the generations to come. Because we have lived, and loved God and man, here in this place, others will also know, who never heard our name or knew of our existence, that ' this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'

CHAPTER XX

OBLIGATION IN RELIGION

THE subject of obligation in religion, so well understood and insisted upon in some parts of the Catholic Church of Christ, is an unpopular one in England in these days. The Englishman's conception of religion is that of something over which one has a wide liberty of choice whether to obey or disobey. It is also commonly felt, and often said, that one can only be religious when one feels in the mood for it ; and that if one is disinclined to pray or to worship it is unnecessary, nay, almost wrong, to attempt to force oneself in any way. On the other hand, a tradition runs through a great part of the historic Catholic Church on earth that certain obligations of worship and of the receiving of Sacraments are laid upon all Christian people.

The idea is a very ancient one. In those parts of the Church to which I have made reference, as in times past in England, and actually in certain parts of the English Church still, there has been no fear of using the word ' must.' It is claimed, I know, that such an obligation, for instance, as being present at the Holy Eucharist on Sundays and on certain holy days has fallen into such neglect in the Church of England during the last few centuries that it would be hopeless to attempt to revive it. In

fact, however, the attempt is being rather widely and partly successfully made.

TWO CLASSES OF PEOPLE

It is a matter of common observation that men and women fall roughly into two classes—those who are interested in religion, and those who are not. It is true that in between these classes there are innumerable varieties of outlook which make it difficult to distinguish the one class at all clearly from the other ; though in these days, when there is no kind of public opinion compelling those who do not care about religion to pretend that they do, now that church-going is unusual, and interest in prayer slight, the distinction is clearer than it has ever been before.

There are those men and women, then, who are by nature religious. They have a more or less constant sense of the presence of the Eternal in the things of everyday life ; they love the worship of God—or at least they generally do—and it has gradually become a habit with them to go to church on Sunday, and at any rate to try to pray. There is no need to teach them of the obligation of worship, nor to point out that the service of God is, at least in theory, the most important matter in life ; they admit all this. I suppose that most, although perhaps not all, of those who read this book are of this class.

On the other hand, there is a vast multitude of men and women for whom religion appears to have little or no attraction at all. They are frankly bored by religious services ; their heart is no whit stirred

by psalms or hymns or spiritual songs ; they have little experience of prayer, and what they have dates from long ago. They may be deeply interested in other matters, and brilliantly clever in their own departments ; often they are delightful, lovable, and attractive—perhaps more attractive than some of the keener Church people. At any rate they, no less than we, are the children of God.

What is to be done for them ? It is a problem in which every Christian person ought to be deeply interested. After all, these dear people belong to us ; it may be a brother, a sister, a wife, a friend ; and we grieve from our hearts that what means everything to us should mean little or nothing to them. Sometimes they tell us that their only connection with institutional religion is through their love for us.

It is not only Catholicism ; every living form of religion has to think of and try to provide for these people. Some forms of religion, even of Christianity, have utterly despaired of them and thought that God despaired of them too ; so that eminent theologians have divided mankind into two groups : the elect (those who cannot fall away, but are destined by the eternal foreknowledge of God to salvation) and over against them the reprobate (those who from the first are hopeless, for whom nothing remains, because they are incapable of religion, but utter and eternal loss). These, it has been maintained, are predestined by God to unending misery. The Catholic Church has never said that, though her theologians may sometimes have tried to get her to say it ; she follows our Lord, Who came to call ' not the right-

eous, but sinners, to repentance '—to bring those in that are out of the way.

THE CATHOLIC METHOD

The historic Catholic Church follows a method which we can state in broad outline. What, in effect, she says of these dear, simple people is something of this kind : ' It is true you have not a gift of great spiritual perception. For some mysterious reason your life is not highly organized in that direction. It may be that you will never find any very profound joy in worship, or prayer, or Sacraments—but it is perfectly untrue to suggest that you are incapable of loving or pleasing God. You are a child of God, created in His image ; Jesus Christ died for you ; you, just as much as any one else, are destined for the eternal joy of the vision of God. But if you are to realize yourself and God's purpose for you, you cannot trust to impulse or to your natural self. You must make a simple Rule of Life : it must contain worship of God—the best you can give with the help that the Church of God provides ; therefore, you must be present on Sunday and on certain great holy days at the offering of the Holy Eucharist. You may not want to go, and even when you are there the service may bore you ; it may not seem that it has much to do with you. But you must put all that away : you really *must* worship God in this way every Sunday. And there must be prayer, too ; daily and regular morning and evening prayer. It must not be allowed to depend on inclination or on disinclination. It must be regarded as a daily duty, with which nothing can be allowed to interfere

unless you are ill or otherwise really prevented. There must be repentance and confession of sin—followed by union with our Lord in the Sacrament of His love ; and even this must be according to rule. You will often feel disinclined for your communion ; but that must not prevent you from coming, unless you have committed such a sin as to make it clearly improper—for all this can issue into a longing determination to avoid sin and to grow nearer to God.'

This is of obligation ; so says the historic Catholic Church of Christ. Indeed she says further, that not one of us can depend only on the spontaneous arising in our hearts of love of God. It is true that no religion can be made compulsory, nor any part of it ; but we have to tell many people that if they want really to learn and to love these things *must* be done. 'Ah !' I hear people say. 'How formal, how cold, how patronizing ; what is the use of this cut-and-dried system—surely the Church of England was wise, at and after the Reformation, in dropping all that !'

I think a little real experience and some knowledge of human nature may lead us to think differently. This rule may be criticized as a 'minimum religion' ; but not justly, for the Church is never content to say, 'Do this and be satisfied ; it is enough.' No, it is the starting point, not the goal, and leads to wonderful and unexpected results.

On the other hand one may see on all sides the wretched results of the absence of any such discipline in the Church of England. I, personally, know hundreds of men and women who dimly want God

and God's love, but never get any nearer because they never have been brought into what, after all, is the warm atmosphere of the Catholic religion. If they are never taught of the duty of worship, penitence, and Communion as of obligation for Christians, they very soon starve spiritually ; the desire goes from lack of encouragement ; they drift into that vast class of modern English people for whom religion has ceased to have any significance at all. If, therefore, they are to be saved from falling away, let them be taught that the practice of religion is of obligation.

I know perfectly well how much some of my readers will dislike this insistence on rule. I can only say that I know the ordinary English man and English woman of many classes very well ; and also that I have heard many times the argument against obligation ; and that knowing and having carefully listened to and weighed it all, I remain convinced that for most of us the religious life needs discipline and rule.

I have dealt so far in this chapter with a great system or method through which the Church has, for centuries, dealt with those who apparently can only be saved by a strict discipline. But it means more than that to us. It may be that we ourselves feel no need for any such rule as this, and yet that we often are deplorably slack. It may be, too, that even we are inclined to rebel against any kind of discipline, and are led far too much by inclination and disinclination in religious matters. If that be so, then we must remember S. Paul's words—' We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities

of the weak and not to please ourselves.' What must be the effect on that person whom we love and long to win for our Lord, if he sees us obviously pleasing ourselves ; if he hears us grumbling and criticizing our Church and its methods ; if he knows that we are slack and half-hearted ; if he observes that we go to church on Sunday when we feel inclined, but not otherwise ; that we go to Communion—unless we happen to be tired after a dance, or feel slightly unwell after a dinner party ; or if he sees that we take no care to help our servants to get to church and Communion.

Our keeping of the Church's rule is more than a personal matter. We may convince ourselves, if we think about it at all, that our example does not make much difference. But it does. We *ought* to be applying every act of regular Sunday worship, every repentance and confession, every Communion, to the helping of the weaker ones. When disinclination comes, and we are tempted to think that ' after all it does not matter whether I go this Sunday or not,' we have to remember that it may or may not matter to us, but it matters very much to others. For their sakes we must be stern with ourselves. They may not see what is going on, but they are strengthened in ways which neither we nor they can fully understand.

By being thus faithful to a rule which may seem elementary to us, we are not only obeying a divine command for the benefit of our own souls, but we are bearing other people's burdens and so ' fulfilling the law of Christ.'

CHAPTER XXI

RITUAL

WE have so far been thinking principally of the interior life of prayer. But we have, from time to time, glanced at corporate worship, and it is worth while to devote one chapter to the outward side of our religion ; to the way in which, being human, we set it forth in ritual and ceremonial.

These two aspects of worship are too often confused. For instance, a church where the ceremonial is elaborate is commonly referred to as ' very ritualistic.' Strangely enough, there is conveyed in such a phrase a certain very definite contempt. The ordinary man sets ritual and ceremonial in contrast with what he calls ' real religion.' In fact, ritual and ceremonial are inseparable, being both of them aspects of the mode in which we approach God in worship ; but logically, and for purposes of consideration, they may be separated, and it is important to think of them separately in order that we may estimate their properly high place in our religious life.

RITUAL

What, then, is ritual and what are its origins ? Ritual is not ceremonial, although it is commonly thought to be so. ' Rite '—the order of the

prayers in which we worship God. It is a succession of acts of prayer, penitence, praise, adoration, which go to make up what we call 'the service.' I propose to narrow down our subject to one aspect of it.

We will not think of those services which are called the 'Choir Offices'—that is, Morning and Evening Prayer; nor of the Occasional Offices, Baptism, Confirmation, Ordination, and so on. We will confine our consideration to 'The Eucharist,' since this is the centre of Christian worship offered in obedience to the direct command of our Lord.

The origins of the rite in which we as Catholics take part so often are many and various, and very ancient. Some are pre-Christian, others are even prehistoric. There is no need to be frightened about this; it is part of the attractiveness of our Christianity that we see premonitions of it all through the life of man on the earth. It is obviously impossible to do more than draw a mere outline of the venerable history of the Christian rite, although even that is better than the ignorance of most Church people as to their service; and it is important to say at this point that if we seem to be here concerned with matters not directly spiritual, we do not forget that for all of us the spiritual aspect comes first. It is, however, one of the most interesting sides of modern religion that the spiritual side of it is being constantly fortified by knowledge of the ancient origins of our beautiful rites and our ancient prayers.

There are two principal origins of the Christian and Catholic rite. They are Israel and Greece. It is not necessary to do more than remind readers of

the first. We are all acquainted to some extent with the Old Testament and with the outline of the Temple worship. It would be well, however, if some of us were to put away our contempt for the Old Testament and give fresh study to that extraordinary and wonderful collection of spiritual literature. The only thing we need note about the later worship of Israel is that it was largely sacrificial. We know little of the words used, except that the psalms so familiar to us were deeply embedded in Jewish worship. We have besides a few more passages in the Old Testament, which are all of the nature of ritual ; but it would seem that only late in the history of the religion of Israel did any idea of congregational worship, save very occasionally, get much hold. There were occasionally great assemblies in Jerusalem and in other sanctuaries, but the local synagogue appears to have been a later growth and probably arose during and after the period of exile.

The Greek sources of our rite are much less generally recognized, perhaps because they bear on the outside little resemblance to what we usually call 'worship.' The Greek ritual was parallel with that of Israel in so far as it also consisted, largely, of sacrifice. The point on which I want to dwell, however, is the influence of Greek poetry and drama on the Christian offering of the Eucharist. Except for occasional political and athletic assemblies, the only great congregations of the Greeks would appear to have been the audiences at the performance of the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and the other dramatists. These were regarded, to a considerable extent, as of obligation, and certainly as

being definitely religious. The performance was of the utmost solemnity and the plays were directed to moral and spiritual ends.

If we go back, as we can, not to the first beginnings, but to early developments of Greek poetry and drama, we find that essentially it consisted in three points—speech, song, and bodily movement. The bard, as we read of him in Homer, not only tells the story of the great past, he is excited to movement as he sings. He is impelled to dance, or to imitate the action he describes. Here we find ritual and ceremonial, not in their earliest phrase, but at an early point of their development. Immense periods of pre-history lie behind even this primitive stage. But, further, in this speech and action of the bard there was something more than mere secular dance and song ; it was a sacred matter, closely bound up with religion ; the subject matter was never far removed from the idea and worship of the gods.

And what were the subjects of this ancient drama, and that more developed and splendid Greek tragedy into which it developed ? They were the most profound matters in human knowledge. 'Love and Death ; those are the two chief subjects of this primitive Molpe. Next there is Strife, whether for defeat or victory. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are full of it ; no ancient comedy is without it, and, properly understood, no ancient tragedy. . . . It is love won in spite of obstacles and enemies ; it is Death in the midst of strife and glory, especially Death averted or conquered.' [1]

[1] Gilbert Murray, *The Classical Tradition in Poetry*, p. 39. Cf. also pp. 7 f. of this book.

And are not these the things which lie at the heart of the Holy Eucharist ? In it, as in the Greek drama, we see love triumphing over death, robbing death of its sting and the grave of its victory ; the revelation of the life beyond death.

We see then how here, as in so many other places, it is not only in the Old Testament that God has prepared the world for His Church and for the worship of the Church. I do not know how my readers feel about this, but I confess that to me the knowledge that what I do every Sunday and most other days of my life in the celebration of the Christian Mysteries links up with the glory that was the Greece, as well as with that primitive and stern holiness of the Old Testament revelation, is one of the great enchantments of religion. It is only another sign of what I see more and more clearly—that we cannot restrict God's working to any nation or literature or place, but that all the nations of the world bring their glory and honour into the kingdom of God.

OUR RITE

But we must now go on and see how at a certain point in history these two great ritual traditions, the Hebrew and Greek, combined with others far too many to write of, were sanctified into the Christian Eucharist. When the Lord Christ in the Upper Room at Jerusalem took bread and blessed it and break it, and gave it to the disciples ; when, likewise, He took the cup and blessed it and said, ' Drink ye all of this,' He was perfecting and fulfilling far more than the Old Testament types. He was drawing together all the ancient past, and using its varied

elements for sacramental union between God and man. Out of that fusion has grown the mighty drama of the worship of the Catholic Church. We are not afraid, as some people are, of using the word 'drama' of our great service. It is indeed the most splendid and significant drama the world has ever seen.

The fusion of the Hebrew and Greek ritual and ceremonial was not accomplished at once. The developing history of Christianity was needed if both were to be drawn into the service of worship. We know little of the earliest Christian Eucharist. We are told that the Christians 'continued in the Apostles' fellowship and in the prayers, and in the breaking of bread.' S. Paul writes of 'psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs,' and urges his converts to use them in worship. But here again our sources are few and obscure. We know little of the first Christian rite. What we may be sure of is that it enshrined at its centre our Lord's words of Institution, and that soon, if not at once, the ancient Scriptures, the psalms, and ancient prayers and intercessions were drawn into the new worship. But during the lifetime of the Apostles themselves the Christian Eucharist travelled far beyond Palestine, and before long we find clear traces of two great traditions which have lasted up to the present day.

There was an Eastern tradition associated with the name of S. John, having its roots in Asia Minor, and spreading to, or coming from, Syria, especially Antioch. It was affected, necessarily and at once, by the Greek spirit which it has retained until to-day. Then there was the traditional rite of Rome associ-

ated especially with the name of S. Peter and growing up at the heart of the Empire. This, too, like all things Roman in those later days, has been greatly Hellenized. There is a lovely ideal picture of it—imaginative but scholarly—in *Marius the Epicurean*,'[1] where Walter Pater describes the Eucharist as offered during the reign of Marcus Aurelius in the late second century in the house of Cecilia, out on the Appian Way. Read it : it will give you a serene and beautiful picture of early Catholic worship.

In the course of history these two rites—Eastern and Western—have themselves partly fused. Men went backwards and forwards from Italy to the East, and from the East to Italy ; and in those days when the Church was still undivided the acceptance of this or that part of another Catholic rite was easy and natural. But the sadder days of division caused an estrangement of rite, more marked than difference of doctrine. Yet still the differences are minor ones. It is true that the Eastern rite is stranger to us English people than the Western. The Mass at S. Philip's, Buckingham Palace Road—according to the Eastern rite—is much less easy for us to understand than the Mass at Westminster Cathedral, but the essence is the same. The rites are sister rites—both are Christian and Catholic.

Our own English rite is directly in line with all of which we have been thinking. Regarded, indeed, in comparison with the earlier forms—East and West—it is here and there somewhat disarranged ; yet our Communion Service is recognizably and essentially the same thing ; it comes down to us

[1] Chapter xxiii.

from the same ancient parentage ; it has the same venerable Christian and pre-Christian associations ; it gives us the same sense of the ages, and the same atmosphere of the spiritual world. We have all the necessary parts, setting forth the divine history of love, of life and death, of love triumphing over death and of that which comes after death. We must never forget that separated in communion as we unhappily are from the Church of Rome, and still in a great measure from the Churches of the East, our central act of worship is in all its main points identical. Amid all our differences and controversies let us never forget that spiritually we worship the same God through the same Lord Jesus Christ in the same august sacramental rite. It may be elaborate here, and simple there, but to those who understand it it is recognizably the same.

DIVISIONS OF THE RITE

Let us now very briefly see how far the chief parts of the rite are identical throughout the Catholic world. The first part of our Church of England service is introductory—preparatory to the rest. It begins, as all rites begin, with a setting forth of our unworthiness to approach God, which is expressed in penitence—whether it be in the form of the *Kyrie*, said in the ancient Greek, or ' Lord, have mercy,' said in English, or as the responses to the Ten Commandments, is a detail. The element is there. Then follow the Collects ; these ancient and illustrious prayers coming down, many of them, from the fourth, fifth, or sixth centuries, and fragrant with

the devotion of millions of the servants of God ; epigrammatic, close-packed with meaning. Then comes the very ancient element of reading or singing of Holy Scripture in the form of the Epistle and Gospel. The Creed is a late introduction into the Mass, usually recited only on festival days. It is appropriate and full of teaching, and forms a magnificent hymn of faith, but it is not in the early rite. There follows what is called the Offertory. This in reality is a necessary act to which a certain ritual, prayers, and necessary ceremonial have become attached. It is necessary to place the bread and wine in order upon the altar, and the action, as we shall see presently, is performed in as seemly a manner as possible.

After this point, in our rite, there is some dislocation. In the more ancient services the Offertory is followed by the *Sursum corda* ('Lift up your hearts') and all that comes immediately after it. This is commonly known as the Preface, since it is what comes before the Consecration, the offering, and the Communion which are the heart of the Catholic rite. In our Prayer Book there follows, here, the great intercession which more properly precedes the Consecration. We know it as the 'Prayer for the Church Militant.' The Confession and Absolution which occur here in the Prayer Book should properly come immediately before the Communion of the people. It seems to many of us to be quite plainly out of place at this point, and we wish that the revisers of the Prayer Book had seen their way to return to something more like the ancient model. But there is some ancient authority for the

present arrangement, at least for the position of the 'Prayer for the Church Militant.'

At any rate, after this is the Consecration, with the Communion of the priest and people, the centre and heart of which is the repetition of the words used by our Lord at the Institution and the receiving of the Sacrament. What follows the Communion of the priest and the people is all in the nature of a conclusion. It consists, principally, in thanksgiving. Here there is one change in our English rite which is much criticized by some of us, but has a good deal to be said for it. Anciently the *Gloria* came at the beginning of the service. In our Prayer Book it comes at the end. Much may be said for the view that Bethlehem—of which we think in this magnificent hymn—comes before Calvary, and therefore that the *Gloria* should come earlier in the service. On the other hand, it makes an unparalleled act of thanksgiving for the offering of the Eucharist and for the Holy Communion.

This is a bare outline of that great Christian rite, in which we unworthily have the privilege of bearing our part. It has its roots in the long past history of the world : it has gathered to itself a romance, beauty, and wealth of association which are ever enriching it with fresh spiritual significance. If anywhere on earth—surely here is the house of God. Here is the gate of heaven.

CHAPTER XXII

CEREMONIAL

THE preceding chapter of this book dealt with the meaning of ritual. We took care to dissociate it so far as we could from ceremonial, with which it is so often confused ; as, for instance, when people speak of, and condemn, ' ritualism.'

We found that ritual is not so much action as an ordered mode of prayer and offering by which man approaches God ; prayer, praise, adoration, thanksgiving, penitence. And we considered briefly the structure of the rite which we are accustomed to follow in our worship of God. We did no more than glance at ceremonial, the appropriate and necessary action which accompanies and sets forth the ritual. There must be action of this kind in divine service ; and most people appreciate the fact, and accept ceremonial of one kind or the other. Many find it beautiful, and love it.

Yet we must also face the fact that to some people ceremonial is distasteful. It distracts them. They will even go so far as to call it ' play-acting at the altar.' They cannot understand or appreciate it. Strangely enough, these very people who find what is commonly called ' Catholic ceremonial ' difficult to bear, find no difficulty at all in the order of ceremonial commonly found in more moderate churches, or in cathedrals. This is illogical. Whatever action

accompanies ritual is ceremonial—and the ceremonial act by which the verger carrying the mace precedes the dean and ushers the preacher into the pulpit is just as really ceremonial as the use of incense or any other kind of action in church. Those who dislike any kind of ceremonial often find their way to God differently. In any case here there is little to be done. Their difficulty is probably temperamental, and they never could overcome it.

On the other hand there are many people who, partly through no fault of their own, are prejudiced against ceremonial because they do not understand it, and need to have the underlying idea put reasonably before them. Others, strangely enough, are thrilled by military or social ceremonial but revolt at the same idea appearing in the worship of the Church.

THE PRINCIPLE

Let us first, then, try to find the principle which will guide us in these considerations. We see that ceremonial is the more or less solemn action which necessarily clothes certain ideas. Something has to be said or done which is important ; therefore, let it be done solemnly. This is an instinctive human feeling. The more lofty the ideas are which have to be expressed, the more stately, usually, is the ceremonial. It is not easy to draw the line between words and action, between prayer and ceremonial, so closely are the ideas knit together ; as soul and body, ordinary speech and ordinary action, are inextricably mingled, so it is with rite and ceremonial, particularly in the sphere of worship.

And, indeed, human worship is at its best, as

indeed all human actions and life are, when perfect harmony exists ; when the action symbolizes and explains the words, when the action is most beautifully performed ; in short, when each is appropriate to the other. That is why we are very naturally annoyed by bad, careless, or fussy ceremonial in church ; it irritates us, because instead of being appropriate it is inappropriate, and therefore distracting. Whereas we desire that the ceremonial should symbolize, express, set forth as perfectly as possible, that which is in our hearts. This is what we seek in our worship. Ceremonial can be very simple and good ; it can also be simple and slipshod. It can be complicated and good ; it can also be complicated and fussy. In the first place it does, and in the second place it does not, harmonize with the idea it attempts to set forth.

GOD'S CEREMONIAL

The mind of God in the universe is expressed by a lofty ceremonial, which finds its place in every corner of our world and delights us by its varying beauty. The pageant of the passing seasons, the glory of sunrise and sunset, the movement and sound of the sea, the roar of the wind, the shapes and colours of fire, the thousand other delightful, and sometimes terrifying, sounds and sights, are the outward expressions of what God says to us through His creation. He speaks to us, indeed, in the silence of our hearts, but not there only ; He is seen and heard in all nature. For what is the significance of it all ? God has certain things to say or to do ; they may be immense and eternal, or they may be appar-

ently small and passing. Yet He is in them all alike, and He clothes them in outward splendour. They are symbols of what is unseen, and full of significance to those who see with the eyes of the spirit. But we love them not for themselves. They possess no absolute beauty ; they are of value to us as setting forth the eternal movement of God. They reveal Him to us ; they enable us to worship Him with an uplifting of the heart we should hardly have been able to achieve without them.

CEREMONIAL IN HUMAN AFFAIRS

Our own small human affairs, also, are in a hundred ways clothed in ceremonial. Life would be naked and bare indeed, and we should soon drop back to savagery, if it were not for the decent and appropriate regulations which some foolish persons despise as ' conventionalism.'

This outward ceremonial differs much in degree according to the importance of what has to be set forth. The ceremonial of the Royal Court shows one aspect of it. The most determined pacifist, if he has imagination, can hardly fail to be moved by the stately ceremonial of the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace, or by the stirring music of the band with which S. James's Park rings every morning when the King is in town. This ceremonial, and all that goes with it, has an immense power to civilize, to stabilize, to soften the necessary hardness of government.

The same idea obtains in quite ordinary life. Very properly we surround our commonest actions with a considerable amount of ceremonial. How

different our civilized eating and drinking is from the barbarous and uncouth grabbing of the savage ! We surround our meals with patience, courtesy, seemliness. What we call 'good manners' is a system of elaborate and necessary ceremonial ; so complicated, indeed, that it takes years to learn it properly ; and some people never learn it at all. How very important it is to know how to behave in somebody else's house, or in one's own. How quickly we should relapse into dirt, quarrelsomeness, and barbarism if we were not careful of our manners. Much of our civilization depends upon them.

What we have been trying to see in nature and in man's life obtains still in a far more important way, in divine service. The worship of God should be regulated by decency and good-breeding. That is, by a careful and reverent ceremonial ; since we feel that a peculiar solemnity attaches to what we do in church. These are divine things. This is the meeting-place of earth and heaven.

If we rightly wish that our social life should be distinguished by seemliness ; if we are stirred by ancient tradition surviving into our modern days, surely we shall wish that the worship of God also should be set forth by a solemn and stately ceremonial. Like the rite which it expresses, Catholic ceremonial is a growth of the ages. It has clothed the rite in a lovely outward dress, taken from many civilizations and derived from the art of many nations. It is ancient, venerable, beautiful. Fortunate are those Christians whose hearts are uplifted by its symbolism to that adoration of God of which it is the outward and visible sign.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WHOLE FELLOWSHIP

MUCH of this book has been concerned with the personal life of prayer, as lived by individual Christians in these modern days. It is necessary at the end to think out that aspect of the subject which has to do with the whole company of Christian people regarded as worshippers together of God. These are days in which the institutional Church is regarded with much suspicion, and is severely criticized. But there are also hopeful signs of a revival of corporate prayer and worship, which in one way support the individual in his prayer, and in another call upon him to give of his best to the whole body of praying people. This chapter may seem to be much concerned with ways and means, with organization and the outward life of the Church ; but that is because a strong visible Church, united and vigorous, is necessary as the background of the inner life.

THE DANGER OF INDIVIDUALISM

Individualism in religion has been a marked weakness of the post-Reformation English Church from the sixteenth century onwards. The average Englishman upholds the right of private judgement as against the idea of submission to authority. The

decidedly Protestant bias which has been dominant until lately has emphasized this view of the spiritual life.

The personal approach to God ; the necessity that every intelligent person should do a great deal of thinking for himself, is an entirely congruous part of Christianity. England will never go back to that conception of blind obedience to an external authority which was possible in the Middle Ages. But individual judgement has disastrously overlaid the thought of corporate religion, corporate thinking, reasonable authority. Even many of those to whom Catholicism is congenial tend towards individualism in prayer and Sacrament. They realize pretty fully the value to their own soul of the interior life, and of union with God through Christ ; but they think little of its bearing on their relation even with those who are members of the same local congregation as themselves. On a slightly larger scale is the narrowness of congregationalism ; and on a national scale that disastrous insularity which obsesses so many members of the Church of England to-day.

There are persons of great piety who appear to find it almost impossible to worship God anywhere but in the particular building to which they have grown accustomed, and which has come to have special religious associations for them. If they go away for a holiday, they cannot feel at home in any church, even if the services bear a general resemblance to those to which they are accustomed at home. While, if there is any marked difference, they scarcely feel that they have worshipped God at all. Beyond this, there is a tendency in some con-

gregations to hold neighbouring churches in contempt, too often founded in jealousy or in differences in ' schools of thought.'

These, no doubt, are matters of detail, and small. But they are unattractive symptoms of something bigger than themselves. They show an unimaginative frame of mind which takes no interest in the general and greater organizations of the whole Church, or even of the local and diocesan life. The individual or the little group dwell in one small corner of the Church, keen and interested, it may be, in that, but oblivious of any broader fellowship. This can only be got right by a widening of the outlook of the person or of the congregation. The purpose of this chapter is to suggest that it may be achieved : (1) By the fostering of the sense of corporate adoration of God, transcending the worship of the individual, in each local congregation. (2) By a deliberate purpose of the congregation (led by the clergy) to throw itself into the life of the rural deanery and the diocese. (3) By the persistent looking out to the work of the whole Anglican Communion, at home and overseas. (4) By the resolute refusal to acquiesce in any narrowness of outlook (the bane of the Church of England) on the rest of Christendom, and a warming of the imagination which will lead to the realization of the essential unity of the Church even to-day. ' All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father everlasting.'

As o'er each continent and island
The dawn leads on another day,
The voice of prayer is never silent,
Nor dies the strain of praise away.

Yes, even the prayer and praise of Roman Catholics !

THE SENSE OF CORPORATE WORSHIP

The atmosphere of any service in any church is made by that which each worshipper is giving. You go into some churches (of any and every school of thought) and you feel chilled. Whatever the service may be, there is no warmth, no life. Usually in such churches the congregation is sparse, for the same reasons which make the atmosphere cold. At the heart of it lies the fact that the members of the congregation are thinking more of what they are expecting to get than of what they are trying to give. Often it will be because the sermon is regarded as the matter of chief importance, or because the ceremonial is so much the centre of consideration that the heart has gone out of the worship. Whatever it may be, the dreariness is unmistakable.

And in other congregations (equally of any and every school of thought) you will find warmth and devotion and love. We rather often to-day hear priests and laity sneering at the success of a neighbouring church, and deprecating the ' worship of numbers.' There may sometimes be something in it ; but I have over and over again noticed that large congregations are also keen and live ones. Men and women are attracted by a warm atmosphere of real worship.

There is a good deal of unreality in much of the talk of people who say that they would rather have a few convinced people in church than a great crowd of ' half-baked.' I sometimes doubt the sincerity

of that argument. It does not follow that a small congregation is devotionally strong. A small nucleus of true worshippers seldom remains small ; their adoration of God is catching, and they soon draw others into their company.

But it must be adoration, and adoration of God in fellowship. Each worshipper, while first conscious of the majesty of God, will also be conscious of those who are kneeling or standing around him. He must be deliberately meaning to help them by his own concentration on praise and prayer. He must be loving them in God, while he tries to love God best of all. Wherever there is such a consciousness as this it is palpable at once. And this kind of atmosphere blesses those who dwell in it.

I remember a special occasion of this kind, not long ago. The nave of York Minster was filled with a great crowd of three thousand people, mostly men. The purpose of their meeting was a great one. I shall never forget the corporate singing of certain well-known hymns on that occasion. There was a magnificent sense of worship in fellowship. If that can be so in the case of ordinary hymns, what could not be done through Eucharistic worship ?

But if such worship is to be, then all must be able to take their full share in the service. To listen to a choir singing a fine Mass by Palestrina or Schubert, or to some good ' setting ' to the Canticles, is no doubt an aesthetic and spiritual joy to some of us ; it is to me. But it is useless *as worship* to the average man or woman. They must have something to employ their lips and tongues ; they must be able

to sing themselves. That is why it is so dangerous and unkind to take away their hymns from an English congregation, or to ask them to 'worship in silence' while the choir sings for them. The tyranny of choirs is less patiently borne than it was; it is full time it was checked.

But all this is merely an important illustration of the point I am trying to make; that if we are to cure ourselves of individualism, localism, lack of imagination, we must begin with the congregation, and first make that a body of men and women consciously worshipping God in fellowship.

THE RURAL DEANERY

The mention of the rural deanery may well strike a chill to the heart of my readers, whether of the clergy or the laity. I ask them to take courage, and to consider carefully the fact that the revival of the rural deanery—an ancient and venerable institution which has by no means lost its uses—must be part of any corporate revival of Church life in England.

But a heroic effort is needed. In too many cases the rural dean is appointed, not because he is keen, or efficient, or young, but because he has been a long time in the deanery, or because he is incumbent of an important local parish, or because 'he would love to have it.' In consequence, the Chapters (for the clergy) are often infrequent, badly attended, and deadly dull. Once when I was a member of a very illustrious rural deanery (wild horses should not drag its name from me), at a time when the Church was rocking with affairs of the greatest interest, the subject chosen for the twice-yearly chapter was—Assyri-

ology ! The Ruridecanal Conference (for clergy and laity) is commonly occupied with long-drawn-out business discussions, at the end of which a distinguished visitor, who has been invited for the purpose, is given no time at all in which to speak on some vital aspect of Church life. How often we have heard the rural dean say feebly, 'We must not take much longer over business ; we shall leave Mr. So-and-so no time!' And still the interminable dullness goes on !

The rural deanery ought to be the next step from the congregation to the wider Church ; and all the members of the congregation ought to be aware of it and interested in it. Most people would grant the truth of what was written in the last section about worship ; but they do not see that the parish and congregation is concerned also with the local Church life around it. And if there is ever to be a revival of the corporate life and worship of the Church of England, it must first centre in the rural deanery, and begin with the clergy there gathered in the chapter. Here and there a good deal has already been done, but spasmodically and rather precariously.

The rural deanery is the one local organization in which ideally all meet. The different schools of thought are equal there. It ought to be a permanent centre of unity, bringing together those who in belief and practice are opposed in the parishes. Here, too, in the ruridecanal conference, the laity meet. Men and women who would never know one another except for this opportunity, exchange their views in the discussions at the conference. It

is the diocese—indeed, it is the Church of England —in little. Here are the protagonists of the different parties meeting one another, taking part in discussions for the good of the Church in general, learning from one another, seeing other points of view.

It is a really great opportunity ; but it is too often a lost one. I am aware that there are live rural deaneries, and that in many places they are more seriously regarded than they were. But a great deal still remains to be done. And if any rural deanery is to be revived, the first thing to be done is for the bishop to appoint the best man rural dean, irrespective of his ' party colour ' or his age ; and not to think it necessary to choose a ' non-party ' man, just because he is moderate, nor an old man because of his long and perhaps undistinguished service.

It is sometimes objected that the best man is unavailable, because he has so many other things to do. But a live rural deanery would make unnecessary a vast amount of organization which has grown up largely on account of the inefficiency at the centre. Time after time keen bodies of people have banded themselves together to do this or that piece of work, just because the deanery (or the diocese) is not alive, or because officialdom is cold and suspicious. There are numbers of societies which will cease to exist when the Church begins to take more interest in the affairs of all its children, instead of regarding everything which is not strictly moderate as outside the official life. But I must not let myself go on this subject. I will only add that it is deplorable to notice the approval given so gener-

ally by authority to 'non-party' groups; what we want everywhere is 'all-party' groups, and particularly in the rural deaneries; since it is there that the different parties have the opportunity of getting together.

So I would urge that the next outward move from the parish and congregation is to revived rural deaneries, aiming above all at the fostering of fellowship between clergy and laity. But it must not stop at official business, or even at the growth of personal friendships. The aim, at first for the clergy and then for the laity—or better still for both at once—is corporate study and corporate prayer. It is agreed by many of the best judges of the present situation in the Church of England that the first need is a revived priesthood. We of the clergy—most of us—need the discipline of serious study and regular prayer. The very press of modern parish life has often seemed to make both so difficult as to seem almost impossible. Here the rural deanery might help its clergy very greatly; it would seem to be the body which everywhere might take up this imperative work.

The result would be a refreshed experience of the possibilities of corporate worship, both at centres where all could meet, and also in the parishes and churches themselves. The organization is here, ready to hand; it only needs a fresh infusion of life such as a keen bishop—better still, a keen and united bench of bishops—could give. Undeniably the problem needs heroic handling; but the new life which is astir in the Church might well be made to flow once again in the ancient channels.

THE DIOCESE

The diocese is, and has for long been, more of a force than the rural deanery. It arouses more interest, perhaps because the local bishop is a person of importance, and his visits, for Confirmation or other purposes, are red-letter days in the life of the parish. There is the cathedral, too, a visible centre of life such as is not possessed on a smaller scale in most rural deaneries. It is too true that anomalies remain. I think if the present state of the cathedral of the great Diocese of Oxford had ceased in the middle of the eighteenth century, we should have marvelled that such a scandal had remained for so long a period. There, as is well known, the cathedral is primarily the chapel of an illustrious college, well hidden away in the centre of the college. During term time the whole of the centre of nave and choir is set apart for a handful of dons and undergraduates, and any persons belonging merely to the city or diocese are huddled away into the very small aisles and transepts. The cathedral staff, with the exception of one of the canons, are University magnates, taking slight interest in the diocese. It is not easy to imagine a Buckinghamshire farm labourer approaching the mother church of his diocese !

But this case now constitutes an exception to the general rule. All over England the cathedrals are reviving. In a growing number of instances they are free and open all day without payment. The deans and canons are doing all in their power to make the cathedral the central meeting place of the whole

diocesan life. Great services are held to which representatives come from the remotest parishes. In many of the cathedrals intercession is made for the clergy and people of every parish in turn, the parishes on their part undertaking to remember the cathedral. Altars are restored in the chapels, dedicated in the name of an appropriate saint to this or that side of the diocesan life. The last ten or twelve years have seen a notable revival, which is full of hope. It is a far cry to the days when the bishop was a remote potentate dwelling apart in the comfort or discomfort of a feudal castle, and when the cathedral was the preserve of a body of well-paid and virtuous but often somewhat decrepit old gentlemen. It is exceedingly unlikely that the comforts of the Close of Barchester will ever return.

The effect of all this on the consciousness of parishes and congregations is already marked. The bishop may not be quite so grand as he was, but he is a good deal better known and loved ; the cathedral is not a venerable museum, but the home of warm and far-spreading life. Thus there comes a notable extension of the outlook of the individual member of the Church.

THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

It is not a happy symptom of Church life that so many writers, some of whom ought to know better, confuse the Church of England with that great body, dispersed throughout the world, which is in communion with the See of Canterbury. It seems often to be tacitly taken for granted that a diocesan bishop of the Church in England enjoys some higher

consecration than one who has spent his life in the work of the Church overseas. There are in the minds of most people at home two grades of bishop, home and colonial. This attitude of mind displays a sadly disproportioned view of the Church of Christ. It would not be admitted, if questioned, of course; but there it is.

The same kind of want of proportion has lately been seen in the Prayer Book controversy which has so disturbed the Church. I wonder how many people fully realized that the affair was a purely local one, applying only to England, and not involving even Wales or Scotland, far less America or Africa or Australia ?

But a sense of enlargement is growing. It is difficult to overestimate the effect on the thought of the Church in England which has been brought about by the publication of the six Missionary Reports of the Missionary Council on work overseas. They have been widely studied, even in the remotest parishes, and are bringing a new view of the Church as world-wide to great numbers of people. Gradually, it may be hoped, the Church of England will see things in their true proportions, and the duty of the Church as one, wherever the work may be.

THE WHOLE CHURCH

Less progress is made in the task of getting every worshipper in our churches to think of the whole body of Christian people. We are still very apt to mistrust Roman Catholics and despise ' Nonconformists.' And, on the other hand, some of us are

so properly eager for the healing of divisions at home that we forget people abroad. Some time ago, Lord Hugh Cecil said some interesting and telling things in a letter to *The Times* : [1]

' I earnestly desire,' he said, ' that, if we are to unite with any religious body not now in communion with the See of Canterbury it shall be a body whose members do not speak the English language. Otherwise I think we are in serious danger of sinking into a sort of Anglo-Saxon Judaism, less justifiable than the original against which S. Paul contended. We are already much too prone to think that Christianity must be English in order to be of the best quality ; and we shall never achieve a real Catholicism in the sense in which Evangelicals as well as High Churchmen value it unless we can join in communion with foreigners.'

Lord Hugh goes on to mention, as an instance of what he would desire, reunion with the Eastern Orthodox Churches, with whom theologically we are so nearly in agreement.

We all long for reunion, but we see that it is not going to be easy, or quickly achieved. Great principles are involved and cannot be overstepped or taken out of the way. But it is already possible to see the whole company of Christian people as one body of worshippers of God. Much of the old bitterness has gone ; we are moving in a new atmosphere. The sense of the inevitability of our divisions has given way to a sense of shame. But in the end it is not the leaders who count ; they have to draw after them the general body of the rank and file, and that is a much more difficult matter than the reaching of agreements by learned and broad-minded

[1] February 22, 1929.

men in a warm atmosphere of friendliness. The leaders have to go back to their constituencies and convince the average man and woman. And that brings us back to the point from which this book started. The primary work of the teachers of our day is to bring to those whom they instruct a conception of God adequate to the best in the ancient tradition, and also to the best we know of Him in these modern days. This renewed sense of the glory of God, shared by teachers and taught, will issue in more intelligent prayer, and in a heightened capacity to adore God. This is the noblest contribution we can make to that work of reunion which we know to be the will of Christ our Saviour.

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